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NATHALIE;

A TALE.

BY

JULIA KAVANAGH,

AUTHOR OF "WOMAN IN FRANCE," "MADELEINE," &c.

A creature not too pure or good
For human nature's daily food;
For transient sorrows, simple wiles,
Praise, blame, love, kisses, tears, and smiles.

WORDSWORTH.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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NATHALIE.

CHAPTER I.

"Bring in the light, and tell Mademoiselle Nathalie that it is my desire to speak to her instantly."

Mademoiselle Dantin uttered her commands in a sharp, imperative tone. A timid-looking servant, in conical Norman cap, and short petticoats of startling fulness, vanished as if to hear were to obey, and the old schoolmistress stiffly sank back in her chair, with arms folded on her breast and a frown upon her brow.

It was a chill Norman evening—almost cool enough for England, and, in the deepening twilight, the room looked well-nigh dark. Through the narrow panes of a low glass door penetrated a faint gleam of lingering light, and the shadowy outlines of a few tall trees were dimly visible in the garden beyond. Thus seen, without light or fire, in the gathering gloom of evening, with pale maps and

shadowy globes, long sombre curtains, and stiff straight-backed chairs, the apartment looked most comfortless; but the withered features and rigid figure of Mademoiselle Dantin made her look by far the most dreary object it contained.

She was thin, wrinkled, and hard-favoured; she wore no amiable look, nor was she very amiable in reality; being dogmatic and imperious, she rather liked teaching; it was power—authority, and turned out, moreover, to be as good a way as any of fastening her own peculiar opinions—more strongly marked than varied—on others. But then, as misfortune would have it, she had a decided antipathy to children and young girls, so that between her delight in the tuition and her general aversion for the objects taught—an aversion which, as usual, was most heartily returned — Mademoiselle Dantin and her pupils had rather an uncomfortable life of it, and might not have got on at all, had there happened to be another school and schoolmistress in the town of Sainville.

Sainville—we cannot advise the reader to look for it on the map—is a quiet little place buried in the very bosom of Normandy. This province is perhaps the prettiest, and certainly is the greenest nook in all the pleasant land of France. It has many low hills, many shallow little valleys, with bright glancing streams and a clear blue sky; above all, it has picturesque old towns of quaint and venerable aspect,

that seize on the imagination with a peculiar and mysterious charm. Dark, lonely, and rather misanthropic-looking, these quiet places contrast strikingly with the cheerful verdure and soft pastoral beauty of the surrounding scenery; they look like morose hermits, who have at least chosen pleasant spots wherein to do penance. But though their quaintness strikes the eye, and their monastic gloom awakes the fancy, they are cold and cheerless—they cannot win the heart; we feel that there life glides away in too dull and monotonous a flow; we look, wonder, linger for a while in narrow, winding streets, with crazy wooden houses rising high on either side, and then pass on, feeling we have left a human prison behind us.

Sainville was one of those little moral islands; it had no trade, no commerce, no life, and was, moreover, shut out from the great and busy world by a barrier of aristocratic châteaux rising on the slope of the surrounding declivities, or enjoying the shade and silence of the neighbouring valleys. In these luxurious abodes, life was as gay and pleasant as heart could wish, and some of the best of French society could make it. Balls, plays, concerts, fishing excursions, and hunting parties, seemed to be ever renewing for the amusement of the privileged owners and guests of the châteaux. Many a time did the inhabitants of Sainville, who all belonged to the smaller bourgeoisie, and who had not wealth, importance, or talent to rise above their station, comment, with the puritanic

severity of the excluded, on the sin and folly transacted in those abodes whence ever proceeded the sounds of merriment and pleasure; and many a time did they grumble more morosely still, when wakened in the early morning by some gay cavalcade clattering away along the silent streets.

This exclusion, in which she shared like her fellow citizens, had not improved the mind or temper of Mademoiselle Dantin. She had accustomed herself to think of nothing save her school, its propriety, its ceremonious routine, above all its immaculate purity; and on this subject she had grown to be somewhat severe and irritable. She was so in a peculiar degree on the day when this story opens. This was, however, a day which generally found and left her in a singular state of good humour, being neither more nor less than that appointed for the annual distribution of prizes among her pupils. On the morning of this eventful ceremony the room had been hung with white draperies, ornamented with green wreaths. Mademoiselle Dantin opened the proceedings by seating herself on a sort of throne erected at the upper end of the room, from which elevated position she looked down triumphantly on the curled heads and white robes of the pupils, who demurely sat in rows in the centre of the apartment, whilst their friends and relatives formed a semicircle around them. After making a little speech, Mademoiselle Dantin, holding an eyeglass in her right hand, and a paper in her left, sen-

tentiously read aloud the names of the pupils on whom she had resolved to confer the distinction of a prize. Each of the girls thus designated then left her place and walked up to a tight, lively-looking little gentleman, in a dark wig, the professor of dancing, who sat alone between two tables, one covered with books, the other with wreaths, took from his hands the volume adjudged to her, and stooped to receive the laurel wreath which, with prompt and courteous grace, he rose to place on her head, whilst delighted papas and mammas shed tears, and Mademoiselle Dantin looked on and felt in her glory. When there were no more prizes or wreaths to give, Mademoiselle Dantin rose, and the company dispersed, the children all going home for their holidays. As soon as every one had departed, the schoolmistress gave prompt orders for the taking down of hangings and wreaths: in a few minutes all was over; the room was empty, the walls were bare, and the school, instead of being filled with the murmuring hum of pupils conning over their lessons, fell into a deep and unnatural stillness, destined to last six weeks. But though the ceremony had passed off in the best possible manner, the triumph of this day was soon clouded by a discovery which filled the mind of the schoolmistress with indignant wrath. What that discovery was will be seen farther on.

A few minutes had elapsed since she had, in a tone of ominous severity, given, with regard to the appearance of "Mademoiselle Nathalie," the order recorded in the

first lines of this chapter, when the door of the room where she sat opened, and Marianne, the servant, entered, bearing a lighted tallow candle in an old plated candlestick, which she placed on the table before her mistress.

"Well?" observed Mademoiselle Dantin, with inquiring sharpness.

"Mademoiselle Nathalie is not in her room," was the low reply.

"Not in her room! and what is she allowed a room of her own for unless to be in it?" exclaimed the schoolmistress, with subdued irritation.

'Perhaps she s gone to breathe a little fresh air in the garden," timidly suggested Marianne.

"Not at this hour, Marianne," majestically replied Mademoiselle Dantin; "no, I will not admit that any member of my establishment, however faulty in other respects," she feelingly added, "could, against my well-known rule, be out in the garden at this hour."

"Shall I go and see, madame?"

"No, Marianne, I cannot allow that; to allow it would be to admit such a thing as possible, and this I never will; look for her in the class."

Marianne silently left the room, but the door did not close behind her. For the head and wig of the "Professor" who had played so important a part in the morning's ceremony, suddenly made their appearance in the dark aperture, smiled and nodded at Made-

moiselle Dantin with mingled familiarity and respect, and lisped in a tone of soft entreaty: "May I come in?"

"Yes, Monsieur le Chevalier, you may come in," replied the schoolmistress, half rising from her seat; her tone was gracious and mollified, and a faint smile passed over her faded face. Thus encouraged, the Chevalier, a middle-aged little man with a thin, sallow visage, quick eyes, and an aquiline nose, entered the room with erect bearing and elastic tread. He was proceeding to shut the door with a prompt decision natural to him, when Mademoiselle Dantin shook her head, and admonishingly observed:

"The door, Monsieur le Chevalier."

"Ah! yes, the door," he sighed, and left it open.

"Rules must be obeyed," continued the schoolmistress.

"Yes, rules must be obeyed," answered the Chevalier, repressing a shiver as the keen draught came full upon him.

It was a rule in Mademoiselle Dantin's establishment, for no lady to converse with a gentleman, not her father or brother, in a closed room. The mistress was the first to set the example, and obey the rule in all its severity. To say the truth, she generally sat facing the door; and the male visitor, whoever he might be, had his back turned to it, so that all the hardship of this rule could not be said to fall upon her; but what gentleman would complain,

when feminine modesty was at stake? assuredly not so devoted a squire of dames as the Chevalier Théodore de Méranville-Louville.

No mummery ever yet existed without some special adviser or other in male shape, and what a father confessor might have been to an abbess and her gentle sisterhood, the Chevalier was to Mademoiselle Dantin and her fair pupils. He was the only individual of his sex attached to the establishment, for the salic law still holds good with regard to the tuition of dancing. To this law Mademoiselle Dantin, who, if she could, would have effaced the masculine gender from dictionary and grammar, very indignantly submitted. But the gentle blood of the Chevalier, who, though of an impoverished family, had an authentic claim to the noble names he bore, and his title of Knight of the Legion of Honour, bestowed upon him for saving a drowning man, but which many considered a government reward for his invention of a new *pas*, called the Sainville *pas*, a rumour he rather favoured—above all, his chivalrous devotedness to the fair sex, had conquered the antipathy and subdued the obdurate heart of the schoolmistress. Woman was indeed sacred as woman to the gallant little Chevalier; he cherished a platonic and universal passion for the whole sex, and reverenced a petticoat in its earliest and latest stages; he believed neither in little girls nor in aged dames; he took off his hat to young ladies of six, and flirted with

ladies of sixty, and did both with equal grace. But though thus gentle to those whom he called "earthly angels," the Chevalier was to his own sex stern and somewhat haughty.

Having taken the seat which Mademoiselle Dantin condescendingly designated, the Chevalier could not but notice the gloom which overshadowed the features of the fair schoolmistress. In a neat little speech, he immediately expressed his sympathy with the regret she naturally felt at the temporary separation between herself and her beloved pupils. Mademoiselle Dantin tossed her head.

"As if I cared for the little flirts!" she said, almost indignantly.

The Chevalier looked distressed. Flirts! there were no flirts in his creed.

"A set of forward coquettes!" continued she.

"Oh! Madame!" he exclaimed, raising his hands imploringly.

"And of deceitful minxes, as all girls are," she persisted.

The Chevalier was shocked. He gently endeavoured to remonstrate, and ventured to remind her, "That though women were tender flowers at every age, they were frail, very frail rosebuds in their youth."

"Well, then, one of the rosebuds is going to get a nipping," retorted Mademoiselle Dantin, looking as dark and chill as a wintry breeze.

She rang the bell as she spoke, and Marianne promptly made her appearance.

"Is Mademoiselle Nathalie coming or not?" asked the schoolmistress.

"Yes, madame; she said she would come directly."

"Pray where did you find her?"

The girl hesitated.

"In the garden, reading," she replied at length.

Mademoiselle Dantin rose.

"Chevalier," she said, with great state, "be good enough to leave me. I have a duty to perform;—an act of justice and authority to exercise. I must be alone."

The Chevalier rose, looked dismayed, but retired on tiptoe, without so much as remonstrating. He knew that Mademoiselle Dantin's justice was always administered privately, and with a strictness of secrecy that, like the Vehmgericht, only rendered it more awful to the apprehension of the uninitiated.

"What has our pretty southern flower done?" he poetically inquired, as Marianne closed the door and followed him out; but the girl only shook her head in reply, and seemed struck with consternation.

As soon as she was alone, Mademoiselle Dantin walked up to the glass door that led into the garden, and stood there for a few seconds, peering through the narrow panes with sharp attention. There was a peculiar smile on her face as she turned away and resumed her seat. Scarcely had she done

so when the glass door opened. The schoolmistress heard it very well, but did not choose to look up; a light step glided in, still she remained motionless and grim, looking straight before her. It is the culprit that must seek the glance of the judge, and not the judge that must look at the culprit. Mademoiselle Dantin was a true Normande, litigious in spirit, and versed in legal knowledge; besides the rules which she mercilessly imposed on others, she had certain rules for her own use, which she rigidly obeyed: one of these rules was to give a judicial form to almost everything she did.

"Did you wish to speak to me, madame?" asked a clear, cheerful voice at her elbow.

The schoolmistress made no reply, but slowly raised her head, and turned it with a keen and severe glance in the direction whence the voice had proceeded. A handsome, slender girl of seventeen or eighteen years of age, very simply attired in black, but dark-haired, dark-eyed, and with animated features of southern symmetry, was standing by her side. This was Nathalie Montolieu, chief and only resident teacher in the establishment of Mademoiselle Dantin.

She was scarcely above the middle height of woman, but of a light and erect figure. Freedom and careless grace marked her look, her bearing, and her attitude, even whilst she stood there quietly by the chair of the old schoolmistress. As she turned slightly to hear Mademoiselle Dantin's expected reply, with

an air too easy to be dignified, but not free from the quick, impatient pride of youth, the light which fell full on her whole person, leaving all dark behind it, gave to the outline of her graceful figure, and to her clear and well-defined profile a vivid distinctness, still further heightened by the shadowy background of the ill-lit room. The brow open and poetic, with wavy hair braided back; the dark eyes soft and deep through all their fire; the short upper lip and curved chin told a daughter of the sunny south; and the innate southern grace of her half-averted head and listening attitude, would have been the very desire of a sculptor's eye. Yet hers was not the still beauty of cold art; it had the light from within which is to a countenance as is the lambent flame to the alabaster lamp in which it burns; the warm ray which reveals, though it may not create, its beauty. And in her that ray seemed, from the ever-varying expression of her mobile features, to burn with a light as changeful as it was clear. She had not the soothing and almost divine calm of perfect loveliness. Her beauty charmed because it was so human with the light and bloom of youth, and all the genial warmth of her ripening years. It was neither serene nor angel-like, but fervent and living; not ideal though highly poetic.

Indeed, to look upon her as she stood there, to see her intelligent forehead and arched eyebrows, to meet her look, gentle though fearless, and seldom veiled by drooping eyelids, to mark the flexibility, denoting

both courage and a temper easily moved, of her delicately chiselled features, above all to note the light, capricious smile of her sensitive and half-parted lips,—those lips of the south averse to silence, and which express so quickly and so significantly frankness, impatience, good-humoured raillery, or angry disdain,—was to know her as one in whom blended both the highest and the weakest attributes of an imaginative and impulsive woman; from the energy, passion, and devotion of the heart to the caprice and endless mobility of temper destined to render life as changeful as an April day.

"Did you wish to speak to me?" she asked again, in a quick, impatient tone, which rendered the fulness of her southern voice and its rapid accent still more apparent.

She glanced down somewhat impatiently as she spoke, and the life and warm colouring of her whole countenance contrasted strikingly with the stony look and pale, rigid features of Mademoiselle Dantin.

"I did wish to speak to you; I sent for you for that express purpose, and you will soon know why," replied the schoolmistress, in the long, nasal drawl of Normandy; "but first, may I ask why, against my express rule, you were out in the garden at this late hour?"

"I did not think the rule applied to the holidays," quietly replied the young girl.

"Then I beg to inform you that it does."

An expression of much annoyance passed over the features of Nathalie, but she subdued it, and merely said, "Very well, madame."

"Indeed," resumed Mademoiselle Dantin, "I think it strange that you should like the garden at this hour, and I should feel inclined to make some remarks on the subject, did I not remember that as a Provençal, that is to say, a native of that southern part of France which has never been remarkable for the observance of feminine propriety, you are entitled to indulgence."

A kindling light passed in the dark eyes of the southern girl, but the schoolmistress never noticed it, and resumed in the same ceremonious, legal tone:

"May I ask what you were doing in the garden at this late hour?"

"I was reading."

"Some pernicious romance, of course. Must I ever keep telling you that it is dangerous and improper to feed your mind with the absurdities which abound in such works? Must I keep assuring you that no character is so ridiculous as that of a romantic young lady?"

"Romantic!" echoed Nathalie, with a gesture of impatience; "and what has one in my position to be romantic about, madame? The realities of my life are surely sufficient to drive all romance away."

"True. Besides, you are so sensible and so pru-

dent. Will you favour me, however, with the name of the book you were reading?"

"It was a very harmless book."

"Was it a fiction?"

"An innocent one at least."

"Which was, of course, the reason why you hid it in your pocket before coming in?" said the schoolmistress, closing up her thin lips with an ironical smile, and triumphantly straightening her meagre neck.

Nathalie gave her a quick look, dropped her eyes, and smiled demurely.

"I assure you, madame," she slowly observed, "that the book is a harmless book. Interesting, however, for the character of the hero, though somewhat stern, is original and striking. I confess I like him; the whole story is, no doubt, melo-dramatic, but——"

"How did you get it?" interrupted Mademoiselle Dantin, with a sort of sudden jerk in her look and speech, which she held infallible for the detection of deceit.

"I found it in the garden, where it had been left by one of the pupils," quietly answered the young girl.

"One of the pupils? Good Heavens! And this is what goes on in spite of all my vigilance. Give me that book, Mademoiselle Montolieu; give me that book," she repeated, with a sort of desperate calmness that seemed to say she was quite ready to obtain it, no matter what the cost might be.

Nathalie smiled again, this time rather scornfully, but the book was produced and laid on the table. Mademoiselle Dantin took up the volume, drew the light nearer, looked, and laying down the book, gave the young teacher a glance of indignant wrath.

The dangerous fiction was a volume of romantic fairy tales. Nathalie's face beamed with pleasure and mischief as she met Mademoiselle Dantin's look of exasperation; but the lady soon recovered, and merely observed in a sharp key:

"I really wonder, Mademoiselle Montolieu, you will persist in losing your time with such foolish reading."

"I took up the book by chance. I fell on a story which, I acknowledge it, interested me. The chief character, though dark, is not without a mysterious power of attraction."

"Mademoiselle Montolieu," inquired the schoolmistress, with slow and dignified amazement, "do you imagine I asked you to come here in order to hear your opinion of a fairy tale? You are guilty of the strangest absurdities! I suppose ladies in the south talk in that heedless, flighty manner. Remember that in Normandy it will not do. I beg, therefore, that you will—if it is indeed possible—restrain your southern vivacity for a few moments. May I ask if you remember the conditions we made when you entered this house three years ago?"

"I remember. I was to teach French, music, geography."

"I do not speak of that."

"History, arithmetic, &c., for the sum of three hundred francs a-year."

"Mademoiselle Montolieu, you wilfully misunderstand me."

"Board and lodging included."

"Mademoiselle Montolieu!" exclaimed the schoolmistress, folding her arms, "will you be so good as to remain silent."

Nathalie looked all innocence, but a furtive smile lurked around the corners of her mouth.

"If I spoke, madame," she composedly replied, "it was because you asked if I remembered the conditions."

"I alluded to moral conditions; not to those paltry conditions of money, board, and lodging, on which your mind is always running."

"And yet, madame, you say I am romantic."

"The moral part which passed between us when you entered this house three years ago," resumed Mademoiselle Dantin, without heeding the young teacher's last remark, and closing her eyes to speak with more effect, "related to the morality, the propriety, the purity,——"

"I think I had better take a seat to hear you," quietly observed Nathalie, and she took one as she spoke, seating herself so as to receive the full benefit

of the awful glance the schoolmistress immediately directed towards her. But the young girl, leaning her elbow on the table, and resting her chin on the palm of her left hand, eyed her stern mistress without impertinence, though very composedly. Her look, always expressive, was now particularly so; it said in plain language: "I have been called in for a quarrel—I know it—I am used to it; I have tried to avoid it, but since I cannot, go on; I am ready."

Mademoiselle Dantin resumed:

"The moral part or series of moral conditions—I hold part to be quite as correct an expression, but shall use 'series' for the sake of clearness—the series of moral conditions I alluded to bore reference to the propriety, the purity, the womanly reserve of your conduct."

"In what have I failed?" asked Nathalie, with an impetuosity that showed patience did not rank amongst her peculiar virtues.

"Strict womanly propriety and discretion," continued the schoolmistress, "were to be your chief attributes. Without modesty ———"

A flush crossed the brow of Nathalie; her voice trembled as she spoke:

"Your hints are becoming insulting. Madame, beware!"

"If you had condescended to hear me to the end," said Mademoiselle Dantin, with irritating coolness, "there would have been no necessity for this unfemi-

nine burst of temper. And this reminds me of another remark I wish to make to you: you are in Normandy, not in Provence; pray remember it. You must please to drop that rapid and startling mode of speech, to talk a little lower, to laugh less, and to keep your southern blood and temper rather more under your control. What may have been only an agreeable vivacity in your native province, is unladylike and repulsive here."

Nathalie eyed her very quietly.

"You were talking about modesty," she said, in a tone calm enough for the most phlegmatic Normande.

"I was, and if you will be so good as not to interrupt me, I mean to give you a definition of that virtue. Modesty I conceive to be the strict guard which a woman of principle keeps over her looks and demeanour with persons of the opposite sex. In that reserve you have failed."

"How so?" asked Nathalie, whose voice had already lost some of its calmness.

"Mademoiselle Montolieu," frigidly observed the schoolmistress, "I have begged, I now implore you not to interrupt me. I will tell you how you have failed: you are vain; you think yourself handsome; you flirt, as well as you can, with every man you meet. Oh! you need not give me that basilisk look; it is so. Your alluring ways in a certain quarter have not escaped me. If you were only ambitious, I should not mind; but the immodesty of the thing revolts me."

"For heaven's sake, madame," exclaimed Nathalie, tapping her foot with uncontrollable impatience, "be so good as to say at once the ill-natured thing you have been aiming at all along."

"Mademoiselle Montolieu," reproachfully said the schoolmistress, "have you really no idea of that beautiful feminine composure which subdues the manifestation of everything approaching emotion? If you would only remember that the most bitter quarrel can and ought to be conducted like a logical discussion; if, instead of speaking in that vehement way, you had only said quietly, 'Will you be so good, madame, as to come to the point?' or something of the kind. Mademoiselle Montolieu," she feelingly added, "there is a form in everything, and your want of form will break my heart."

She looked and felt distressed. If she tormented Nathalie, the young teacher certainly tormented her almost as much. They were antipathetic by nature, temperament, and birth; theirs was the old quarrel of the northern and southern races,—a quarrel which has endured for ages, and will endure ages still. The schoolmistress kept the teacher because she was full of intelligence and talent, and much loved by the pupils; the teacher remained because she was poor and needed a home. The Dantin discipline had failed to subdue her vivacity of spirit and temper; she was still the gay and yet ardent Provençal girl, with all the fire and impulsiveness of her race. But though

to others she might seem like the beauties of a kindred land, with

> Heart on her lips and soul within her eyes,
> Soft as her clime, and sunny as her skies;

the unhappy schoolmistress, who felt like the keeper of some young and half-wild thing, unhesitatingly pronounced her a proud, passionate, vindictive southern, who would never know anything about the beauties of feminine propriety.

After a moody pause, she now abruptly observed:

"May I ask how long you have been acquainted with our neighbour?"

"What neighbour?" inquired Nathalie, with evident surprise.

"Our next-door neighbour. I ask you how long you have been acquainted with him?"

"I have seen him at a distance, but never spoken to him. I think your question strange."

"No matter. Will you be good enough to be frank for once, and tell me what you know of our neighbour?"

Nathalie looked irritated beyond measure at this pertinacity, but she controlled herself, and replied:

"I know nothing of Monsieur de Sainville, save that he is, as you say, our next-door neighbour,—a gentleman of ancient birth and large property. I have seen him once or twice at a distance, and should not even know him again; I care nothing about him. I scorn your insinuations."

Her face grew flushed as she spoke.

"She scorns my insinuations!" ejaculated the schoolmistress; "scorns what insinuations?" she added, resignedly. "I am not aware I made any with regard to Monsieur de Sainville."

Nathalie looked round, to see her better.

"On whom, then," she abruptly said, "do you accuse me of practising my powers of seduction?"

"Your powers of seduction!" indignantly echoed Mademoiselle Dantin, who detected the disdainful curl of the lip with which the words had been uttered; "I certainly did not accuse you of prac tising what you thus unblushingly allude to on Monsieur de Sainville,—a grave, experienced man, on whom girlish arts or graces are not very likely to take effect. I was not alluding to him, though of course you did not know this, but to his nephew,—Monsieur Charles Marceau."

"Oh! his nephew," slowly repeated Nathalie.

"Yes; but of course you do not know him; of course you have never seen or met him, though he lives next door; of course you do not linger in the garden in the evening in order to be seen or admired by him—oh, no!"

"I was not prepared," ironically replied Nathalie, "to find my evening walks thus interpreted; but let it be a comfort to you to reflect that the garden-wall is high enough in all reason to protect M. Charles Marceau."

"You need not say that with that triumphant

look," returned the schoolmistress, fairly exasperated; "your beauty is not quite so dangerous as all that; as for garden-walls, their height is of little consequence when servants can be bribed to convey messages or letters."

"Madame," said Nathalie, in a low tone, "I am not patient by nature; I believe you know it; I warn you that on some points, and this is one, I will not be patient. I exact that you unsay what you have said, or give me proof that it is true."

She spoke in a subdued key, but with more real anger and haughtiness than she had yet displayed.

"Proof," answered Mademoiselle Dantin, with a smile of conscious triumph; "pray what do you call this?"

She drew forth a letter from her pocket as she spoke, placed it on the table before Nathalie, and significantly laid the forefinger of her right hand upon it, like one who had all along been preparing her little *coup de théâtre*, and knew its value well.

Nathalie looked surprised, but took up the letter and read it without any apparent sign of emotion.

"Well," said she, coolly laying it down again, "what about that letter, madame?"

Mademoiselle Dantin clasped her hands, turned up her eyes, and shook her head.

"The next thing," said she, with wrathful calmness, "will be that you will declare your right to receive such letters. Or maybe I do you injustice,

maybe you do not see the impropriety, because your extreme innocence prevents you from understanding such matters. Poor little thing! she reads fairy tales in the garden."

Nathalie eyed her with a firm, clear glance.

"My innocence," said she, very calmly, "is guarded by something more powerful and secure than ignorance. I for one shall not feign to misunderstand that which is as clear as day. By sight, at least, I know well the person who wrote this letter; the nephew of our proud neighbour. I have met him not once but many times. He has followed me when I have gone to see my sister Rose, down in Sainvillé, and he has stood at a distance when I took the pupils for a walk on the road to Marmont. When I have been in the garden of this house, he has generally been on the terrace of his uncle's garden by which it is overlooked. I confess that I have not given up going to Sainville, or walking into the country, protected by the presence of twenty persons. I have not given up walking in the garden protected by a substantial wall. And now, madame, you know as much as I do of the encouragement given by me to this M. Charles Marceau, who, after honouring me with impertinent attentions, honours me with a still more impertinent declaration of what I must, I suppose, call his love."

"At which I dare say you felt very much offended when you received it," sneered Mademoiselle Dantin.

"It is no doubt very presumptuous for me to be

offended at anything," replied Nathalie, with some bitterness, "but that is not the question. When I asked for proofs of your accusations, you produced this letter. You now say, 'When you received it,' I beg to say that I received it from your hands for the first time."

"I found it in your room, in your drawer," said the schoolmistress, severely.

"And pray," asked Nathalie, angrily, looking up, "what took you to my room, or made you look into my drawers?"

For a moment Mademoiselle Dantin seemed embarrassed, but for a moment only.

"It was my duty," she confidently replied; "I suspected, I knew there was something wrong."

"But the letter was sealed; you broke the seal, and accuse me of having read it first. I do not mean to say that I should not have read it, but I would have mentioned the matter to you to complain of the insolent servant who had become the messenger of this vain and presumptuous young man."

"Admitting that you have not read this letter," inflexibly resumed the schoolmistress, "it is still disgraceful to have received it. Such a thing never before happened in my establishment. This letter would never have been addressed to a strictly modest female. Men, bad as they are, do not act without some encouragement. But there are artful, designing creatures, ever ready to draw into their nets any silly

young man of family and fortune. I owe it to the character of my house to suffer no such persons in it. I consent to bury the past in oblivion," she added, with a magnanimous bend of the head; "but on the express and clearly understood condition, that certain individuals I need not mention by name, will henceforth observe that purity and reserve which ought to characterize their sex. Should this timely hint fail in its effect, a disreputable dismissal must inevitably be the consequence. Such were the remarks I wished to offer to you, Mademoiselle Montolieu. And now I have a few accounts to settle, you may retire."

Nathalie rose, her slender figure was drawn up, her cheeks crimsoned with shame, then grew pale with indignant anger; her dark eyes were dilated and flashed proudly; her lip curled with disdain; ire was in her bearing, her accent, and her look as she spoke.

"Madame!" said she, with the passionate vehemence natural to her, and which she now no longer strove to repress, "I have resided three years under your roof; I have during that time been tasked beyond endurance,—been daily insulted and oppressed. Never, however, did you dare to venture so far as you have ventured to-day. I scorn your insinuations: they are false, mean, and you know it well. You threaten to tarnish my name; Know, then, that strong in the sense of my own purity, I defy both your power and you."

There was a deep silence. Mademoiselle Dantin changed colour, and from pale turned yellow; then bit her lips, and said in a quivering voice:

"Mademoiselle, after this insolent speech, I need not observe that you must cease to belong to my establishment. In a month you leave."

Nathalie haughtily bent her head in token of assent, turned away, and opening the glass door stepped out into the garden followed by the angry and lowering glance of the schoolmistress.

CHAPTER II.

The evening, though chill, was clear. The moon had risen in the east, and her calm light fell over the narrow garden. A wide beech-tree spread its sombre yet graceful masses in the shade, whilst its silvery trunk and foremost boughs received the slanting and tremulous rays of the moon. Beyond rose a group of slender poplars, distinct and dark on the cloudless sky, and casting their long line of waving shadow on the green sward, now of a pale grey hue, in the cool moon-light.

Nathalie was bare-headed and lightly clad, but she did not heed the cool and penetrating breeze which fanned her fevered brow. She had entered the garden because it was the nearest place to which she could escape from Mademoiselle Dantin's presence; she now remained in it, regardless of the faint mist which rose from every group of trees or mass of shrub,

and of the falling dew which made the grass damp beneath her feet. She walked along, not knowing whither she went, her cheek still burning, her warm blood still flowing in a more free and rapid tide, her whole being roused and excited by the spirit of indignant defiance. Her mind was crowded with tumultous thoughts and feelings. The sense of freedom won and triumph achieved predominated. She went on in a sort of dream, unconscious of anything around her, exulting recklessly over her dearly bought independence. She paused on reaching the garden wall, and this simple physical barrier subdued at once her haughty mood. She turned back, and slowly retraced her steps, with a grave and altered mien. A wooden bench stood in the deep shadow of the beech tree, she lingered for awhile near it, motionless and pensive, and at length sat down, looking before her in the same abstracted mood.

The garden of Mademoiselle Dantin was a mere grassy slope, extending at the back of the low and white-walled schoolhouse. The parlour which Nathalie had left, looked almost dark, and a solitary light burned upstairs in the sleeping room of the pupils, for a few still remained in vacation time. She abstractedly watched their shadows moving to and fro across the curtains, until the light was suddenly extinguished, and the whole building relapsed into gloom. Beyond the school, at some distance from it and on a commanding eminence, stood the

château of Sainville, a grey, turretted, lordly-looking mansion, embosomed in stately repose, amidst a dark mass of firs and evergreens, over which the moon now hung mild and pale in the deep blue sky of evening.

The château was, however, by no means a large edifice. Although flanked by stone turrets capped with the conical slate roofs so frequently met with in Normandy, it had evidently never been intended as a place of feudal strength. The light and graceful porch, the ornamented façade, belonged to the style of the *Renaissance*, and showed it to be what it really was,—an elegant and luxurious abode, no more. But if the edifice did not lead back the beholder's mind to those far times when stern barons remained aloof in their fortress holds, it possessed a charm and stateliness of its own. The days of the gay and chivalrous Francis the First returned with the light and sculptured balconies, with the paved court and marble vases, with the broad lawn, the garden terraces, and the sweeping avenues of the surrounding grounds. It was such a dwelling as the royal lover might, in a fond mood, have bestowed on Diana of Poictiers; a place well suited to the courtly revels of a period celebrated for its wealth, magnificence, and voluptuous art. It had indeed been erected under the reign of that gay prince by a Sire de Sainville, whose scutcheon, with the motto, *ung seul desir*, was conspicuously displayed over the whole building. This "only desire" was said by some to have been the

possession of a certain beautiful damsel; others asserted that it alluded to the remarkable firmness or obstinacy hereditary in the blood of the Sainvilles. Of this peculiarity the last descendant of that ancient race, who was also the actual owner of the château, had, according to general report, given abundant proof. Left alone in extreme youth with a broken patrimony, and a name tarnished by the profligacy and extravagance of his father, he had gone to foreign lands, engaged in successful speculations, and, after many years of arduous toil, lately returned in the possession of considerable wealth, with which he had satisfied the creditors of his father, effaced the stain of bankruptcy from his scutcheon, and repurchased his paternal mansion and estates. Little was known of his character, save the pertinacity of purpose indicated by this trait. Nathalie had heard him described as a grave and severe man, of cold and haughty manners. Such he had seemed to her when she had seen him at a distance. She now gazed on the small, though handsome château as it rose before her in the moonlight, with a feeling akin to bitterness. A son of that house, conscious of superior rank and wealth, had thought fit to press on her attentions which he would never have presumed to offer to a woman of a higher station. The consequence to her of this caprice was to cast her unfriended and alone on a world of which she knew nothing, save that it was harsh and severe to the poor.

Passing her hand across her brow, Nathalie endeavoured to banish the gloomy thoughts her position suggested. But she could not do so. The mood which had urged her to defy Mademoiselle Dantin, which had made her rejoice in her liberty, was over. She was free, true; but she felt she had exchanged the imperious rule of one mistress for that of another more tyrannical still, Poverty. There had been a time when the meaning of this word was to her like a dream—poverty in the warm south is divested of half its horrors—but she understood it now. This had been a hard lesson to learn for one whose natural temper was as genial and sunny as her own Provence. Brought up by an old relative in almost unrestrained liberty, she had suddenly found herself cast, by the death of that relative, on her own resources. A half sister, residing in Sainville, had procured her the situation of teacher in Mademoiselle Dantin's school. The change from the south to the north, from freedom to dependence and routine, from affection to freezing indifference, had thrown a chill on the young girl's temper, from which it had never recovered. The shade of doubt had fallen on her hopeful faith; the time was gone when she could feel in herself the native buoyancy that subdues apprehension and fear. The more genial the temper, the more it will dread and feel loneliness, and Nathalie was alone; she had no relatives, save her half-sister, a dependant like herself; no friends, and no money. There were no other schools in the

little town of Sainville, one of the most insignificant places in all Normandy; no families she could enter as governess; no pupils she could teach, save those who came to Mademoiselle Dantin's. Her future looked so blank and so dreary that her heart involuntarily sank within her. "What on earth shall I do?" she asked herself, with an inward shudder. One moment she thought of making her submission to the schoolmistress, but her whole pride rose against it. Any fate seemed preferable to that humiliation.

A low, grating sound near her aroused Nathalie from these reflections. She started to her feet, and turned round hurriedly, with a vague consciousness of the nature of that sound, and of the spot whence it proceeded. No building intervened between the château of Sainville and the school; a wall separated the wide grounds of the one from the narrow garden of the other; the little tenement now occupied by Mademoiselle Dantin had formerly belonged to the gardener of the late Monsieur de Sainville, and the strip of land attached to it had been the kitchen garden of the great house. A door of communication still existed between the two gardens; it stood within a few steps of the beech-tree, and, though she knew that it was always carefully locked on Mademoiselle Dantin's side, Nathalie now felt certain that from it proceeded the sounds she had heard.

She turned round—it was so: the door was open-

ing slowly and cautiously; a stranger, in whom she had no difficulty to recognize Charles Marceau, stepped in, and, leaving the door ajar, turned quietly towards her, apparently neither abashed nor discomposed at the audacity of his intrusion. Nathalie looked at him silently, petrified with amazement. He returned her look, and like her did not speak, as if willing to give her time to recover. Although she had frequently met him, Nathalie had never yet beheld her admirer so nearly; and notwithstanding her anger, surprise, and irritation, she could not help scanning him with a rapid and scrutinizing glance.

Charles Marceau was scarcely above the middle height, with a slight but well-knit frame. He looked upwards of twenty-five; he was in reality some years younger, but his features, though remarkably handsome, were thin, sallow, and careworn. Nathalie was struck with their sharp decisive outlines, as he stood before her on the moonlit sward, his glance fixed upon her, and his pale countenance, half turned towards her, rendered more pale by the dark mass of hair which fell around it. The look which she gave him lasted but a moment; the next she turned away, and was stepping into the path that led to the school, when, by a sudden and dexterous movement, the young man anticipated her, and, though scarcely appearing to do so intentionally, effectually impeded her passage by standing before her.

"I hope," said he, in a respectful tone, and in a

low, though singularly harmonious voice, "that I have not alarmed you."

Nathalie had turned to give him a quick, fearless look; the silent curl of her lip spoke of a feeling very different from fear.

"I see you are deeply offended," he resumed, eyeing her attentively; "be so good——"

"Be so good as to let me pass," sharply said Nathalie.

"But one word, and I depart," he humbly continued. "Did you receive my letter?"

"Ay, sir, from the hands of Mademoiselle Dantin."

A slight raising of the eyebrow, a brief projection of the nether lip, and the word "Indeed!" coolly uttered, were the only marks of surprise or annoyance the young man manifested.

"Then I suppose the girl has betrayed me, after all," he composedly observed, casting an inquiring glance towards Nathalie.

Her colour rose; she looked as if she would give him an annihilating reply; then drew back, turning her head away as if in scorn of speech. She would have moved on; once more he stepped before her and spoke, but now with downcast look and beseeching tone.

"Do not—pray do not turn away so indignantly. Allow me but one word more. Did that letter offend you?"

"No questions, sir," said Nathalie, angrily; "leave me, ere I summon assistance."

Her tone was indignant, though subdued. The young man met her irritated glance as she stood close by him in the clear moonlight, pausing ere she once more endeavoured to pass by; he marked the angry flush which crimsoned her cheek and brow, and his own countenance expressed more vexation and surprise than alarm at the threat she had issued.

"Nay, heaven forbid you should be placed under any such necessity," he somewhat sharply replied; "could I have formed some other method of meeting you, I would never have adopted this. But remember, you seldom go out; you are always accompanied; I may look, but never speak; if I write, my letters are seized. Was I then to trust to chance, or presumptuously hope that, meeting me so often, you would at length guess why I ever lingered around your path?"

He had begun almost haughtily, but his voice had a low and harmonious cadence as he concluded.

"Will you let me pass, or not?" imperatively asked Nathalie.

He bit his lip, but bowed and stepped back a few paces in silent humility. Nathalie very unceremoniously passed by him; he followed, observing, in a low apologetic tone:

"Believe me, but for the tyranny of Mademoiselle Dantin, I should never——"

"Go on, sir, go on," exclaimed a shrill and exasperated voice behind him; "it is charming to hear you. I am delighted, Mademoiselle Montolieu, to find you so pleasantly engaged."

Charles Marceau turned round hastily. Mademoiselle Dantin, who had approached, unheard and unseen, was standing close by him. For a moment, the young man looked disturbed. Nathalie, though she knew well the consequences of this new misfortune, stood ready to meet them, resolute, though motionless and pale. The schoolmistress, her tall and thin frame drawn up to its full height, her arms folded across her breast, eyed them both with a moody glance, slowly nodding her head with vindictive triumph.

"Well," said she, sharply, "why don't you go on? why don't you continue your interesting conversation? I hope I don't prevent you."

She did not seem very likely to prevent Charles Marceau, for, turning once more towards Nathalie, he coolly resumed from where he had left off.

"I should never have presumed to act as I have acted. This imprudence has injured me—justly, perhaps—in your good opinion; yet may I hope that you will forgive me."

He looked up into her face, as if anxiously waiting for her reply. Mademoiselle Dantin, astounded at his coolness, and at the impertinent disregard with which he seemed to treat her presence, glared at him

in speechless wrath. When she spoke at length, the whole torrent of her indignation was poured forth on Nathalie.

"I am delighted," said she, with a short exasperated laugh, "pleased beyond measure, to perceive that Mademoiselle Montolieu, that pattern of propriety, that model of virtuous indignation, entertains no great objection to a quiet evening rendezvous. By moonlight, too;—how sentimental! They are fond of the moonlight in the south; here we think it cool."

Nathalie gave her a kindling look, but did not answer.

"Pray forgive me; I feel it was wrong, very wrong, indeed, to penetrate here, without your permission," said Charles Marceau, addressing Nathalie, but half glancing towards the schoolmistress.

"I hope," exclaimed Mademoiselle Dantin, in a shrill tone, "I sincerely hope Mademoiselle Montolieu will attempt no useless or absurd justification. Mademoiselle Montolieu knows I am not to be duped. She knows the garden door was not only locked, but bolted on this side of the wall, and that by some individual on this side of the wall," she added, raising her voice, "the bolt must therefore have been withdrawn. I consider this as clear a proposition as any in the 'Grammaire Logique,' or any legal case I ever heard of."

"Madame," said Charles Marceau, turning towards

her with something like hauteur, "I pledge you my word that Mademoiselle Montolieu is free from all blame;—that I alone am guilty."

The schoolmistress shut her eyes, and turned up her nose, with a short, disdainful sniff; but she deigned him neither reply nor answering look. He resumed:

"I hope, therefore, that the innocence of Mademoiselle Montolieu——"

"Spare yourself the task of its justification, sir," coldly interrupted Nathalie. "I need none, if Mademoiselle Dantin has overheard all."

"I did," triumphantly answered the schoolmistress, nodding her head, as she spoke, "I heard every word. I hear everything in this establishment, Mademoiselle Montolieu."

"Then surely you know I am not to blame," observed Nathalie, with some impatience.

"Oh, no! Of course not at all!" said Mademoiselle Dantin, gently inclining her head, and eyeing Nathalie, through her half-shut eyes.

"Do you mean to hint that this gentleman is here with my connivance?" exclaimed Nathalie, with that impetuosity which always gave so much advantage to her opponent.

"Oh, no!" replied Mademoiselle Dantin, "by no means. You admit him! Impossible! It was I let him in, certainly."

Indignation and contempt struggled for mastery in Nathalie's expressive countenance. Her head drooped;

she raised her hand to her forehead. When she spoke, her tone was altered and low.

"May heaven forgive you; you are more unjust,—ay, and far more cruel, than I thought you."

This speech did not tend to pacify the schoolmistress, who, to do her justice, thought the young girl guilty; perhaps because she wished to think her so; and though she had witnessed the meeting at a distance, had only overheard the observation in which Charles Marceau so unluckily introduced her name. She now loftily observed:

"You need not give yourself such airs of injured innocence; a pure-minded woman, who regarded either her health or her reputation, would never have stayed out in the open air until this hour."

"I think, madame," interposed Charles Marceau, "that I already explained——"

"Be so kind as to understand that the month's notice I gave you this evening is rescinded," continued Mademoiselle Dantin, totally disregarding the young man's attempted explanation. "After your disgraceful conduct, you cannot remain another night under the shelter of this uncontaminated roof."

"Madame," impatiently observed Charles Marceau, "have I not pledged you my word of honour that I alone am to blame—that this lady is wholly innocent?"

He spoke politely still, but with the authoritative surprise of a superior addressing a person

of inferior rank. The schoolmistress eyed him from head to foot, then raised her look again until it met his.

"Sir," said she, at length, "I forgive your presumption, on account of your extreme youth; but you will please to remember I am mistress of these premises. Be so kind as to quit them, instantly."

Without heeding her, the young man turned towards Nathalie.

"Mademoiselle," said he, in a submissive tone, which contrasted with the superciliousness he had displayed towards the schoolmistress, "words could not express the penitent sorrow I feel."

"I dare say not," cried Mademoiselle Dantin, with a short, hysterical laugh.

"Will my presence here be of the least use to you?" he earnestly continued. "Say but a word; and though this should expose me to the most bitter mortifications, I shall remain."

"Remain!" echoed the schoolmistress, with shrill indignation. "Monsieur will remain to protect mademoiselle! Well, I should like to see that. Remain!"

Not heeding her words more than the breeze which swept by him, Charles Marceau kept his eyes fixed on Nathalie, silently awaiting her reply. The young girl shrugged her shoulders, and tapped her little foot with evident impatience.

"You may go, sir," she said, in her hasty way.

"Your presence, though quite able to produce mischief, is powerless for good."

"Oh! he may go, may he?" sharply ejaculated Mademoiselle Dantin. "How fortunate mademoiselle permits her knight to depart! There is no knowing, however, that I, though neither young nor pretty, might not have found means to effect the same marvel."

The young man heeded her not; he was looking at Nathalie, and his gaze had something of offended pride, anger, sadness, and reproach. But his glance fell at length; he bowed in silent submission, and folding his arms across his breast, slowly turned down the path.

The sound of the door, which closed behind him, revealed that he had left the place. Not satisfied with this evidence, Mademoiselle Dantin threw a keen look around her. On perceiving that he was really gone, she went and bolted the door carefully, then returned to the spot where Nathalie was still standing.

CHAPTER III.

The young girl did not change her attitude; she stood on the sward, erect and calm. The beech-tree threw its dark shadow behind her, but the clear moonlight fell on her face. She looked pale, though sedate; one hand supported her cheek, the other was rather nervously stripping a neighbouring shrub of its leaves. Her heart, perchance, beat fast within her as she saw ruin and disgrace so near, but her brow was as fearless as her look was steady; her lips were firmly compressed as if she had resolved not to speak inconsiderately, though by no means to remain silent. She looked not unlike the mariner who sees the shore on which he must be wrecked ere long, but who beholds it with unquailing eye and heart unappalled by danger. As her glance met that of the school-mistress its resolute meaning roused all her ire; she eyed her for awhile with sour sternness.

"You have heard me," she said at length.

"What have I heard?"

"That you must leave to-night."

"Why so?"

Different as their voices were, they both spoke in the same interjectional and rapid tone, exchanging looks that boded not peace.

"Why so?" again asked Nathalie, and she drew herself up haughtily, as if to repel with all her might the expected accusation and insult.

"Because," the schoolmistress steadily replied, "we are a calm phlegmatic race, and decidedly object to moonlight walks and meetings; because this is Normandy, not Provence, where such things are, I suppose, a matter of course."

Whenever Mademoiselle Dantin wished to rouse the young girl, she taunted her with her mother's birth. The brow of Nathalie flushed directly.

"You are right, madame," she quickly answered; "no, we are not in Provence; for there men have chivalrous honour, and women warm, generous hearts, unknown to this land of lawyers, lawsuits, and narrow feeling."

"Oh! you may give me your killing looks," said Mademoiselle Dantin, shaking her head, "I am not afraid, though I have heard that your Provençal and Basque girls regularly wear a stiletto, instead of a busk to their stays, like those shocking Spanish women."

"Madame," replied Nathalie, shrugging her shoulders, after the French fashion, with disdainful impatience, "we are wandering from the point."

"The point," sharply said the schoolmistress, "is that you must leave this very night."

"I again ask why," inquired Nathalie, eyeing her steadily.

"Because your behaviour has been improper, unwomanly, immodest."

Nathalie's lips quivered, her colour rose and died away, until it settled in a bright burning spot on either cheek. Shame, indignant anger, proud resentment of wrong were in her bearing and her look. Dignity vainly whispered to turn away with silent scorn; Nathalie was too unsophisticated to yield to its promptings; if ever she was or seemed dignified, it was because her mood led her to be so; but now she recked not of effect; insult had stung and roused her, as only insult can sting and rouse; passion was strong and would speak.

"I am not unwomanly or immodest," she passionately cried, her dark eyes flashing through tears, her voice broken by ill-repressed sobs; "I am not, but you are a very bad and cruel woman. To dismiss me is nothing, but to ruin my reputation and fair name is abominable. I did not let that young man in; I did not know he was coming; you must, you do know that.

The most evil are not all pitiless, and Mademoiselle Dantin, who was not a cruel, but an in-

flexible formalist, perhaps began to suspect that she had wrongly accused the young girl; perhaps her threat of instant dismissal had only been held out to give rise to an appeal for mercy; it may even be that some vague feeling of compassion induced her to relent. Whatever was the reason, she at least now said something about permitting her to spend the night in the house; she even hinted that, provided a proper submission were made to her offended majesty, she might be induced not to speak of the meeting she had detected. But Nathalie was in no placable mood; she resented this seeming concession as another implied insult, but to be repelled with haughty disdain.

"Never!" she exclaimed, with true southern energy; "submit when I am innocent,—when I have done no wrong. Never! As for spending the night in this house, after the words you have uttered, I will not. In my country," she added, emphatically, "we are either at peace or at enmity. Now I tell you that I am not at peace with you, that I will not sleep beneath your roof."

"She is positively getting blue with anger," cried Mademoiselle Dantin, with a bewildered look.

"I have borne with ill-temper," continued Nathalie, "with petty annoyances, not patiently—I am not patient—but without more than passing anger. I considered that your years——"

"My years!"

"Your early disappointments had naturally soured your temper."

"Mademoiselle Montolieu, if by early disappointments you allude to my not being married——"

"I allude to nothing, but I say that when you attack my honour I will resent it with all my might; that when you turn against me the stiletto, called slander, I will not be your guest, eat your bread, touch your salt, or sleep beneath your roof. I shall spend this night at the inn, and be on my road to Paris or Provence to-morrow. Say of me all you can say; I do not, I will not fear you."

She abruptly turned away, and when Mademoiselle Dantin recovered from the stupor into which this daring speech had thrown her, Nathalie had almost reached the end of the garden.

"Good heavens! what a tongue!" exclaimed the schoolmistress, drawing in a long breath.

She slowly returned to the house which she reentered by a side door, whilst Nathalie stopped for a while near the glass door of the parlour. The reaction of passion had come—she was weeping; but the weakness was brief; she shook her tears away, smiled to herself and entered the "salon," as it was called, where a solitary light still burned on the table. She was passing rapidly through the room, when an anxious voice exclaimed:

"Mademoiselle Nathalie, what mean those pearly drops?"

Nathalie turned quickly round and stopped on beholding the little Chevalier, whom she had not perceived. He briskly stepped forward and eyed with evident emotion her flushed face, on which indignant tears still glistened.

"I have been insulted, Chevalier," she said in her rapid way.

"Insulted by whom?" he asked, with a frown.

"By a certain neighbour of ours, who imagined, no doubt, I had been pleased with impertinent attentions, and by a certain lady of this house who chose to share this belief."

The Chevalier looked grave. He might in a lady's defence call out a gentleman, but he could not exactly call out another lady.

"This must be a mistake," he at length observed; "mistakes will occur even between amiable ladies, especially when there is southern vivacity on one side and northern prudence on the other. There must be an *éclaircissement*."

Nathalie shook her head.

"Chevalier," she said, calmly enough, for her anger was as brief as it was vehement; "I grant that Mademoiselle Dantin is mistaken; that if she has tormented me, I have provoked her; but no *éclaircissement* could now make me stay here. We agree like fire and water, with this difference that she cannot quench me. Faulty I may be, but she is not the one by whom I can be changed. She will do me justice

in this matter later; I hope and think so; if not, let it be; my own conscience acquits me; I care little for verdict. I am going this very night—adieu."

The little dancing-master drew back with a step expressive of dismay.

"Mademoiselle!" he exclaimed; "going! No, allow me; my feelings will not admit it—it cannot be."

He seemed filled with so much consternation that Nathalie could not repress a smile. He appeared to hesitate; but at length decisively observed:—"Will Mademoiselle Montolieu allow me a question: that—that gentleman——?"

His look finished the sentence. She coloured a little and said:—

"Well, Chevalier, what about that gentleman?"

The little dancing-master coughed: it was so delicate a subject, and he had such a deep, almost painful respect for female delicacy, of which Mademoiselle Dantin had contributed to give him the most refined idea.

"Did he venture on language, too—too—ardent?" he observed with a frown.

"Oh! no," quietly replied Nathalie, "it was much worse."

"Much worse!" echoed the Chevalier, and visions of a kiss stolen from the fair hand of the Provençal girl, rendered the modest little man mute and abashed with indignation.

"Yes, much worse," decisively replied Nathalie; "what do I care about the courtesy or reserve of

manner, when the actions are bold and insulting? He has followed me, written to me, and finally contrived a meeting in the garden, all without any encouragement save what he derived from his own presumption."

She looked indignant as she spoke.

The Chevalier was no doubt devoted to the ladies, but still he was a man, and could in matters of the heart, feel for his own sex; he could, as he expressed it with a sigh, "sympathize with the follies and delirium of youthful passion;" and, provided that profound respect due to every woman were not infringed, he could tolerate almost any extravagance of conduct. It was, he contended, one of the rights and privileges of the fair sex, to make men act extravagantly; and the greater the folly the deeper the love. He now charitably endeavoured to convince Nathalie of this truth. No doubt her admirer had been much to blame, but it was all the fault of his bewildering passion; he had endeavoured to make that passion known by looks, writing and speech. "And as for his getting in by the door," feelingly added the dancing-master, "is it not much better than scrambling over the wall, as so many, unable to control their feelings, would have done in his place? a proceeding certainly more offensive to a lady's delicacy than that which he adopted."

Nathalie heard him with a patient smile. She liked the gentle Chevalier with his old-fashioned courtesy of bygone times, with his reverence for love,

passion and women. Mademoiselle Dantin invariably drew forth the least amiable points in her character, but the Chevalier had the power to soften her down to girlish gentleness and grace. She quietly clasped her hands upon his arm, and looking down into his face, said softly:—

"You do not think me prudish, do you?"

"No, no," he warmly replied; "it is the beautiful, the sensitive delicacy of woman."

"No, it is not that," said the young girl, smiling and drawing up her slender figure, "it is pride;" and there was pride in her dark eye, curling lip, and erect bearing.

"But surely not a pride that forbids you to pity the unhappy passions you have inspired?" urged the tender-hearted Chevalier.

"What passion? He has seen me a few times, never so much as spoken to me before to-night; what passion can he feel?"

The Chevalier, too delicate to speak more openly, shook his head and sighed in the direction of the looking-glass over the mantel-shelf. Nathalie looked at first unconscious of his meaning, but as she saw her own image reflected back in the shadowy depths of the mirror, she blushed, and smiled at the compliment.

"Well, I suppose he finds me pretty," she said, resolutely conquering a little hesitation at speaking so frankly; "but how can I esteem the man who likes me for my face, without so much as knowing

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my heart, mind, or temper? You would not act or feel thus."

"Mademoiselle Montolieu," seriously replied the Chevalier, laying his hand upon his heart, and looking down as he spoke, "must appeal to some less sensitive judge. I cannot, alas! but confess the power of beauty. I may also venture to hint to her that there are mysteries as yet unrevealed to her heart; that love conveys, in the slightest glimpse, an accurate knowledge of the beloved object; and that a particular friend of mine once received from the sight of a foot an impression never to be erased."

"A foot!" exclaimed Nathalie, laughing merrily, "why how can this be?"

But the Chevalier remained quite grave, and assured her that in a man of delicate feelings and sensitive heart such a passion was perfectly natural. As to the particular process by which the first impression ripened into love, he bashfully declared that speech was powerless to describe it, and, as Nathalie laughingly insisted, he quietly begged to change the subject. The young girl perceiving that his modesty was getting alarmed, immediately became serious; he resumed their previous conversation by saying:

"Let me also observe, in favour of the unhappy young man—I call every man unhappy who suffers from a lady's displeasure—that his uncle, Monsieur de Sainville, is generally considered a man of singular coldness and pride; a man whose haughty will——"

Nathalie interrupted him, and said briefly:

"The man, sir, who dares not confess such feelings openly, is not worthy of having them returned. This Monsieur Marceau sought, for his own sake, a concealment which has seriously injured me. He dared not have acted so with a great lady; but I was poor and obscure—therefore he ventured. There might have been something like courage in his conduct had I the stern father, uncle, or guardian, of a heroine of romance to brave; but I had not, and therefore is his action paltry. I am alone, undefended, and he showed me that he knew it."

"No, not alone, not undefended, whilst Theodore de Méranville-Louville has the breath of life and the heart and arm of a man," fervently exclaimed the gallant little dancing-master, half kneeling at her feet in a transport of chivalrous ardour.

In her surprise Nathalie stepped back. She knew not the powerful impression her words had produced on the gentle and generous nature of the Chevalier. He beheld her, a young and lovely girl, in need of protection, and saw nothing better than to offer himself with prompt zeal for the defence of her person and honour. It was not the little man's fault if he came in this world ages after chivalry had gone out of fashion; still less his fault, if nature and fortune, whilst giving him the soul and illusive name, had denied him the shape and profession of knight. Nathalie promptly understood him; she was both amused and touched, and smiled down on the dancing-master through gathering tears.

"Rise, Sir Chevalier," she said, holding out her hand to him, and entering with southern mirth and vivacity into the spirit of the tone he assumed; "if ever I need defender or knight, I will have none save you."

Enraptured at this promise, the Chevalier kissed the tips of her fingers, and rose with the triumphant mien of a knight received into the favour of a fair lady, whilst with a smile that gradually became more arch, she continued:

"But I need not remind a man of your worldly tact, that the time is gone when ladies sought or accepted the vindication of their honour from the strong arm of man."

"And why should it be gone?" he somewhat jealously exclaimed; "why should not the strong arm of man, as you so justly observe, be stretched forth to protect innocence and beauty?"

"Because the world is a slanderous world," replied Nathalie with a serious face, but mirth and mischief in her eyes; "because it would be sure to say that nothing save the most violent passion could impel the Chevalier to take, so energetically, the defence of Mademoiselle Montolieu."

"Well, then," he exclaimed, with much *entraînement*, "since you have perceived my folly, I confess it; yes, I am your slave." He spoke in a very excited tone, and stood with folded arms before her.

At first Nathalie remained stunned.

"Is the poor little man actually in love with me?"

she thought, with dismay; but her fears vanished, when she remembered how eloquently he had pleaded the cause of Charles Marceau. The truth was, that the too sensitive Chevalier was in love with every woman he knew, from Mademoiselle Dantin down to Marianne, and consequently with Nathalie, as well as the rest; her unprotected and painful position—his half-accepted offer of becoming her knight had fired his brain, and, for the moment, he certainly felt a most violent passion, which he was not far from thinking returned. At the same time, he was somewhat dismayed at the boldness of his avowal. Nathalie was too much amused to look angry, and too kind-hearted to laugh; she feigned deafness, and said, quietly:

"I need not tell you how injurious to a lady's reputation any such *éclat* would be; therefore, my good knight, I, your liege lady, lay on you my sovereign commands not to hurt or molest, in any manner whatsoever, the individual named Charles Marceau."

"May I not speak to his uncle?" asked the Chevalier, a little crest-fallen, for he was not quite the dupe of Nathalie's deafness.

"By no means; the uncle has the name of a most disagreeable haughty man—I care no more for him, than I do for his nephew."

"But, Mademoiselle, something must be done,—what will you do?"

"Leave this house to-night," was the calm reply.

"That only makes the matter worse;—I must speak to Mademoiselle Dantin."

"And what can you say to her that she does not know? If, finding me alone in the garden with a young man, she chooses to believe I brought him there, who shall prevent her?"

"I certainly cannot prevent her," replied the dancing-master, with something like dignity, "but there is such a thing as protesting against an injustice. If Mademoiselle Dantin will be unjust to a young and unprotected lady, I shall and must break with her."

He spoke very decisively. Nathalie looked at him with some emotion.

"Monsieur le Chevalier," said she, gently, "you were ill last year." The Chevalier looked very rueful. "You have not many friends in Sainville," she continued, "and then I believe you had but one."

"Yes," he replied thoughtfully, rubbing his aquiline nose, "heaven forbid I should ever forget or deny a lady's favours. Mademoiselle Dantin certainly showed herself a kind lady; the medicines she sent me were rather bitter, but wonderfully fine, I have no doubt: she also sent me some very excellent confitures and jellies when I was getting better—these were sweet."

"My friend," kindly said Nathalie, "you must not break with a woman who has done this, who would do it again, and who, if she has a gentle feeling in her breast, has it for you. Besides, it would be

useless—nothing shall make me stay here; I have been insulted—I must go: be quite easy about me, God is good to all, and kind to the young."

The little Chevalier slapped his forehead distractedly, and paced the room with hasty steps and agitated air. He felt grateful for both medicines and jellies; and the "gentle feeling" of which Nathalie spoke, moved him strangely. He could not, with any delicacy, inquire into the exact nature of Mademoiselle Dantin's weakness, and, indeed, felt rather alarmed at the prospect of ascertaining how far it had gone. But touched and grateful as he felt, it was impossible to forget that he was the sworn knight of another lady now in sore distress. For a moment his fertile and excited imagination represented him as standing between two fair dames,—one certainly lovely, and the other intellectual—is not intellect beauty?—and not knowing on which side to turn. But at length he took a truer and calmer view of the subject, smoothed his wig, composed himself, and magnanimously resolved to abide where gratitude cast her chains around him.

Nathalie smiled when he announced his resolve with a rueful sigh; she bade him a cheerful adieu, and gaily assured him he was none the less her knight. The dancing-master took her hands within his own—an unwonted freedom—and looked at her silently.

"Mademoiselle Montolieu," he said at length, in a moved tone, "you are young, pretty, and very charming, but you have something far better than all

that—a good, kind heart. Happy the man who is to have you, and may God bless him and you !"

Tears stood in his eyes, and in Nathalie's too, as they parted. She went up to her room with a light, cheerful heart. Nothing had occurred to change her position ; but her temper had led her to yield to every impression of the moment, and her present impressions were light and pleasant. Resting her curved chin in the palm of her hand, she paced the room up and down in meditative mood. A smile was on her lips, and the look of her dark eyes was bright and hopeful.

"I am glad I am going," she thought, "truly glad. This perverse woman would positively end by making me enjoy a quarrel. I have enjoyed it—I know I have," she added, a little ruefully ; "but I dare say all this is for the best: I could scarcely have left her otherwise, but now I must go, of course ; and where shall I go, I wonder ?"

She stopped short, and looked grave and disturbed. She was a stranger in Sainville ; her only friend was her sister, and she was now at Rouen, with the old aunt under whose protection she resided. The town inn seemed the only place open to the young girl. It was a quiet, decent house, where few travellers ever came, yet the thought of going there was extremely disagreeable to Nathalie ; she now regretted not having agreed to spend the night in the school. But this was a trifling consideration in comparison to another which offered itself to her attention under the

following startling form: "Mademoiselle Dantin will say I contrived a meeting with that young man in the garden. I did not: but will the world believe her or me?" She endeavoured to chase the thought away, but it would return, and with it the growing conviction that her own version of the story would not be that most favourably received. Disgrace, whether it be merited or not, is hard to bear, in youth especially. Nathalie was one of those impatient spirits who resent injustice in word and feeling. She had never submitted to Mademoiselle Dantin's tyranny; she now felt indignant and amazed that a chain of circumstances over which she seemingly had no power, should have produced results so galling to her pride and so fatal to her welfare. She was young and handsome, therefore she was to be suspected; poor, therefore unfriended and alone; innocent, but not the less disgraced.

"Is this possible?" she asked of herself with incredulous surprise. She thought of Charles, but with increased bitterness and indignation, and as the cause of all her woe. Why had he persecuted her with attentions so fatal, which had tarnished her name, and cast on it a stain she would find it so hard to efface? She found an insult not only in the boldness of his actions, but also in the coolness and composure which characterized them. She recalled with irritation every particular of this interview. "He is not handsome," she ejaculated inwardly; "I looked at him well, and it was not so dark but what I could see: I

like neither his face nor his look; one is too old in feeling, and the other too keen and watchful in expression. His whole conduct was heartless and cruel; he shall find himself mistaken if he imagines it has placed me in his power!"

The mere idea roused her; she also remembered that it was time to act—not merely to think of her departure, but to prepare for it. Ere long her drawers were emptied, and their contents transferred to her trunk. She was cording it up, when a low, timid knock was heard at the door. Nathalie knew it was Marianne, the servant. She bade her enter, and, merely glancing round, resumed her task.

The girl obeyed, closed the door with nervous haste, then remained standing near it without speaking. She had a good-natured face, fresh and full; but her eyes, of a pale blue, had a startled and bewildered look, as if she were in a state of constant alarm.

"Well, Marianne, what is it?" asked Nathalie, in her quick, cheerful way, rising as she spoke to face the girl.

But Marianne, on perceiving the corded trunk, uttered a faint scream. Nathalie gave her a look of surprise.

"Oh, mademoiselle!" exclaimed Marianne, still short of breath, "I have done it!—You are going!—I have done it!"

"You, Marianne!" quickly said Nathalie, looking very vexed. "Do you mean to say you let that young man in?"

Marianne hung down her head and wrung her hands.

"Answer me," imperatively said Nathalie; "did you do it or not?"

"I thought there was no harm," said Marianne, feebly.

"No harm!"

"I mean that you would not be angry."

This did not mend the matter.

"And pray what made you think so?" drily asked Nathalie.

"I thought——I am sure I do not know—but he was so handsome."

"He is not," was the sharp reply; "but he is very insolent, Marianne."

"Oh, is he?" said Marianne, looking rather bewildered. "I am very sorry, but I thought that, being so rich and handsome——as I imagined," she added, correcting herself, "and so fond of you too"—Nathalie's lip curled disdainfully—"I fancied—— I know I ought not to have done it; but Mademoiselle Dantin always says I am so wicked, and I suppose I am," she added, disconsolately.

Nathalie's resentment was as readily appeased as it was easy to awaken. She knew Marianne was a poor weak and nervous creature, whose little original spirit had long been broken by the redoubtable Mademoiselle Dantin. She believed, moreover, that she was attached to her, and had probably thought to serve her by her indiscreet conduct. She now sought

to console her by assuring her of her forgiveness; but on hearing this, Marianne began to sob and moan very drearily, calling all the saints of heaven to witness she had meant no harm.

"Very well," rather abruptly said Nathalie, who was more kind-hearted than patient; "come, Marianne, here is the *fichu* I have cut out for you; you have nothing to do but to hem it."

But as this recalled to Marianne the many similar kindnesses she had received from the young girl, it only added to her grief. Nathalie perceiving that she was getting hysterical, made her sit down, and laying her hand on the girl's shoulder, kindly looked into her face, whilst she said with some gravity:

"You have cried enough, and tears are of no earthly use. You did wrong, meaning well; a common mistake. I have forgiven you, let us hear no more about it; indeed, the sooner you leave this room the better. On reflection, I think it is quite useless your mistress should know what has passed. She would not exonerate me, but say we were accomplices; only Marianne, if another teacher should come in my place, do not let young men get into the garden. And now, what was it you came up here to tell me?"

"Holy Virgin!" cried Marianne, much startled, "I quite forget it! The sight of that trunk—"

"What was it?"

"A message from Mademoiselle Dantin."

"She might have spared herself that trouble," quickly exclaimed Nathalie, colouring very much, as

she spoke; "I have no wish to stay, I am quite ready to go; Marianne, you may tell her so," she added, putting on her shawl and tying her bonnet-strings.

"*Oh! mon Dieu*, mademoiselle," said Marianne, "it was not that at all,—but you are so quick! just like a milksoup,—up directly."

"Well, what was it then?"

"Why I believe it is a strange lady below who wishes to speak to you."

"A lady!" said Nathalie, looking up with much surprise; "and who is she, Marianne?"

Marianne did not know. The lady's face was turned from her, when she answered her mistress's ring, and it was not she who had let her in. Nathalie felt puzzled to imagine who the stranger might be, for she was acquainted with no one in Sainville; but without losing much time in conjecture or accepting Marianne's offer of knowing from the other servant, she resolved to go down and learn.

She paused for a moment on reaching the door of the parlour; it stood ajar, and a ray of light glided from the opening into the dark corridor. She had thought to hear the stranger's voice, and thus learn who she was, but if the room had been vacant it could not have been more silent. With an indefinite feeling between hope and uneasiness, Nathalie pushed the door open and entered.

Mademoiselle Dantin was seated, as when we first saw her, before the table which had been Nathalie's bar of judgment. She looked discomposed: and an

angry spot sat on either of her sallow cheeks, as she fanned herself indignantly with a coarse coloured pocket-handkerchief. At a little distance from her, with her back to the door, stood a lady, who quickly turned round on hearing Nathalie enter.

She was tall, erect, and very richly attired; she looked between forty and fifty; she might have appeared, and she perhaps was, younger, but for the careworn expression of her countenance. Her features were more regular than pleasing; the brow was too low, and the upper lip had a haughty curl, yet the whole face was far from repulsive; many would have pronounced it handsome.

Nathalie looked at her and vaguely felt that she had seen her before, but where or how, she could not remember.

"The young lady, I presume," said the stranger, giving Nathalie a keen look, and addressing Mademoiselle Dantin, in a rich harmonious voice that seemed familiar to the young girl's ear. The schoolmistress gave a short disdainful nod, as the lady turned once more towards Nathalie and observed, with an inclination of the head, between pride and courtesy:

"I am come, Mademoiselle Montolieu, to express my great regret for the indiscretion of which my son rendered himself guilty towards you this evening.—I regret it exceedingly," she added, slightly drawing herself up.

Nathalie bowed silently. She now recognized the

speaker as their neighbour Madame Marceau. The lady continued:

"I am really distressed that a son of our house—that my son—should have acted so. I understand too there is a servant in the case;—it is positively shocking."

She raised a richly-chased vinaigrette to her nose, as if to purify the very idea.

"Shocking!" exclaimed Mademoiselle Dantin, irefully;" it is more, madame, I"—drawing herself up—"I call it abominable! To bribe my servant;—but I shall teach the bold creature her place yet," she added, rising to give the bell-rope a violent pull.

"Not now, madame,—not now," said Madame Marceau, waving her right hand with a haughty grace, that did not misbecome her, whilst her left maintained the vinaigrette in its position;—"not now, I pray. I have no doubt, from what my son has told me, the girl is guilty; I should certainly dismiss her. At the same time, I am sure your ready tact will suggest to you the impropriety of any such explanation at present. You may go," she added, directing a stately nod towards Marianne, who had appeared at the door with her usual bewildered air; "your mistress does not want you yet. Go, my good girl,—go."

Mademoiselle Dantin was no submissive person, yet somehow or other she now resumed her seat, and allowed Marianne to depart in silence. Madame Marceau bore her down completely. It was not the

lady's wealth or station effected this wonder, for the schoolmistress, to do her justice, never stooped save where there was some advantage to be derived, and in the present case there was none; but though she could not exactly understand why, she now felt entirely thrown into the shade. Madame Marceau's stately person and grand ways, her figure, full yet graceful,—her dress of rich silk and ample folds,—her Indian shawl, negligently draped around her, as if it were a thing of no price,—ay, even her bonnet, with the waving plume that rose and fell with every motion of the wearer's head, failed not in their effect, and hushed the wrath of the schoolmistress. Being, however, a woman of very great spirit, she soon rallied, and was preparing for an outbreak of which the exordium would have been relative to the propriety of some people giving orders to their own servants, and other people not going to be trodden upon, when Madame Marceau, perceiving her intention, interfered.

"By-and-bye, my good Mademoiselle Dantin," said she, with a patronizing smile, "by-and-bye; allow me first to explain the case to this young lady. I am distressed, extremely so indeed," she continued, addressing her discourse to Nathalie; "I positively am, at all that has happened. I have been explaining the whole matter to Mademoiselle Dantin, who now understands her mistake,"—the schoolmistress was preparing for an indignant denial, but was not permitted to open her lips,—"by-and-bye, when I

have explained everything to Mademoiselle Montolieu. At the same time," resumed Madame Marceau, again addressing Nathalie, "I have no difficulty in understanding that for many reasons, you may object to remain even one day longer beneath her roof. Will you accept of the hospitality which, when I had confided to him what my son had confided to me, my brother begged of me to offer you? But pray," she added, very graciously, "receive this proposal in the same spirit in which it is made,—as a favour to be conferred upon us. We really shall not be easy unless you afford us this opportunity of repairing my son's deplorable indiscretion." Nathalie made no reply; she evidently hesitated. Madame Marceau gave an anxious look. "I hope," said she, somewhat uneasily, "the offer is not displeasing. I am sure I should be quite grieved——What is it, madame?"

The latter words came out very sharply, and were addressed to Mademoiselle Dantin, who, on hearing Madame Marceau's altered tone and language, had thought proper to recline back in her chair, close her eyes, and give utterance to a disdainful "Bah!"

"What is it, madame?" again asked Madame Marceau, drawing up her fine figure, and wrapping herself with extreme majesty.

"Nothing, madame," shortly replied the schoolmistress.

Madame Marceau eyed her very slowly, then turned once more towards Nathalie, evidently waiting for her reply.

The young girl's resolve was already taken. She did not think that between the inn or the château of Sainville there was much cause to hesitate; she could, moreover, detect a great difference in the tone with which Madame Marceau addressed her, from that in which she spoke to Mademoiselle Dantin; the distinction gratified her wounded pride. But composed as she endeavoured to seem, there was a feeling she could not help betraying, and this feeling was surprise. She knew that the step Madame Marceau now took was the very last any of the *bourgeois* ladies of Sainville would have adopted in similar circumstances. Madame Marceau, who was looking at her very attentively, smiled with a sort of quiet triumph, that seemed to say: "Yes, my dear child, it is so; no little *parvenue* would act thus; but I am a great lady of that old noblesse which has courtesy and chivalry of feeling still. Our titles are nothing; our wealth is gone, but that remains to distinguish us for ever from those of plebeian blood and race."

It was thus at least that Nathalie rapidly interpreted the meaning of the dark and handsome, though haughty face, on which she now gazed; but she subdued her momentary surprise, and replied, with a gravity and composure unusual to her:

"Madame, I sincerely thank you for your offer. I will not say that I accept it, because the circumstances you allude to with so much regret leave me no other choice; my motives are, I trust, of a higher

order. The insinuations which Mademoiselle Dantin has thrown out against me would, I confess it, seem to be justified by my abrupt departure from her establishment, where, nevertheless, I have no wish to remain—no, not one hour longer," she added, giving the schoolmistress a reproachful glance; "but if I leave her house for yours," she continued, again addressing Madame Marceau, "her protection for your protection, I believe that my bitterest enemies, if I have indeed any, must needs be silent; these, and these only, are my motives."

She spoke with quiet pride, almost coldly, for she was jealous of not compromising her dignity.

"Whatever they may be," very graciously replied Madame Marceau, "I am too happy at the result, not to think them excellent; and I feel sure Mademoiselle Dantin shares my gratification at so agreeable a conclusion of an unpleasant matter."

"Madame!" replied the schoolmistress, darting an angry look towards her, and speaking in a tone that quivered with anger, "I might say much, but will confine myself to one remark: for no consideration would I suffer under my roof, as you seem inclined to suffer under yours, such things ——"

"What things?" asked Madame Marceau.

"Such things as a modest woman does not care to mention."

Madame Marceau carried her vinaigrette to her nose with extreme dignity.

"Upon my word, Mademoiselle Dantin," said she,

quietly, "you astonish me. What ideas! for an instructress of youth too; you do astonish me. I believe you are ready, Mademoiselle Montolieu," she added, addressing Nathalie. "Will you be kind enough to take my arm. A servant shall come round for your trunks this evening."

Nathalie silently obeyed, but felt somewhat mortified on recollecting that she was leaving only one trunk behind her. They had reached the door, when Madame Marceau turned round, and coldly observed:

"Good evening, Mademoiselle Dantin. I think it right to observe to you, that Mademoiselle Montolieu being now under my protection, I shall consider any remark derogatory to her as a personal insult to me.

She drew herself up, and turned away. Nathalie followed her example, but not without first casting a look over the gloomy room, with the globes, the maps, the cheerless hearth, the comfortless furniture, the ungracious and withered figure of the schoolmistress, as she sat rigidly in her chair, and feeling, with a sense of inexpressible relief, that she was leaving them all for ever.

A new page in the history of her life was indeed turned over.

CHAPTER IV.

The château of Sainville stood on the brow of an eminence which overlooked the quiet town of Sainville, gathered up below within the shallow compass of a little Norman valley.

A broad road, shaded by trees on either side, wound its way up the steep ascent, passed before the narrow door of the school-house and the iron gateway of the mansion, then abruptly descended the other side of the eminence, and extended far away into the open country, among yellow stubble fields and green meadows, with here and there a solitary dwelling. Of this prospect, which looked gay and pastoral in the sunshine, nothing was visible on the present evening; the moon was obscured by light clouds that slowly passed over her disc, following one another along the gloomy sky, like ships sailing in the same track, until they vanished in the distant depths of heaven; a chill breeze had risen, and its vague

murmurs blended with the rustling sound of the withered leaves which it swept away from the lonely road.

On leaving the school-house, the two ladies turned away from the lingering household lights which still burned in the vale at their feet, and walked along in silence until they reached an avenue of old and majestic elms on their left. At the end of that avenue, rose the old château. The iron gate stood open; they entered, walked to the end and ascended a flight of steps that led to the porch. Their approach seemed to have been witnessed and expected, for the door noiselessly opened to admit them. Nathalie caught a glimpse of a tall servant in black, standing in a respectful attitude in the spacious and lighted hall, a wide and majestic flight of marble steps with railings of rich iron filagree extended beyond. They entered.

"Where is my son?" asked Madame Marceau.

"Monsieur Charles left very shortly after madame."

"Has she asked this that I may know he is gone?" quickly thought Nathalie. She glanced around; the air of grandeur which pervaded all she saw, the obsequious tone and downcast eyes of the servant, the stately dignity of Madame Marceau as she crossed the hall with her haughty mien and her rustling robe, showed her how different was the atmosphere she was entering from that of the world she had left. She was not awed, but could scarcely help feeling impressed. They ascended the staircase in silence.

Madame Marceau paused on reaching the first floor landing. In a recess stood the dark bronze statue of a female slave bearing a pale, transparent lamp, which shed around a soft and subdued light. The elder lady turned towards her companion, and laying her hand on the gilt door-handle of a wide folding-door, she observed, in her rich, full voice, looking down at Nathalie as she spoke, "I must beg leave to introduce you to my aunt the Canoness; she is very old, a little infirm, and rather deaf. I feel confident she will be charmed to know you. Pray do not feel uneasy; she is a very simple person—extremely so. Perhaps we shall also see my brother, Monsieur de Sainville; but pray be quite at your ease."

She spoke so graciously that Nathalie felt vexed at the trepidation which drew forth so much condescension. Daring as she was when roused by injustice, the young girl was nevertheless shy with strangers; she now felt doubly so. What would the old Canoness, probably a rigid old devotee, think of her? How could Monsieur de Sainville, that grave and, if report spoke truly, morose man, consider the obscure girl who had attracted his nephew's attention? Yet with this feeling of uneasiness there blended a strong share of curiosity to obtain a nearer view of one who, whether in good or ill, had excited much attention since his return to Sainville.

Madame Marceau, who was eyeing Nathalie keenly, appeared far from annoyed at what she could read of those feelings in the young girl's veiled countenance.

Complacently patting the hand which rested on her arm, she once more exhorted her to banish all uneasiness, and opening the door, she led the way into a large, old-fashioned drawing-room, with a lofty ceiling and deep windows, now screened by thick crimson curtains that fell to the ground. Several large mirrors gave additional vastness to the apartment, and reflected in their shadowy depths the light of a lamp suspended from the ceiling. In contrast to its soft, pale rays, was the ardent glow of the wood-fire that burned on the hearth, and shone back with a deeper and more burning red from the polished surface of the surrounding furniture. The walls were hung with pictures in heavy gilt frames; they were chiefly old family portraits, and had all the mellow tones of age. There was warmth and richness in the colouring of the whole room.

Nathalie at first shrank behind Madame Marceau and scarcely raised her eyes from the floor. She felt as if Monsieur de Sainville's keen look, of which she had often heard, were fastened upon her; when she at length looked up, blushing and slightly confused, she perceived at the further end of the apartment a very diminutive old lady, seated in a deep arm-chair, by the fire-side, and knitting with extreme rapidity. She did not pause in her occupation or take any notice of their entrance. With mingled relief and disappointment, Nathalie perceived that Monsieur de Sainville was not there. Madame Marceau, still keeping the young girl's arm within her own, and nodding in her

encouraging manner, led her along the room at a slow and stately pace. As they advanced towards the fire-place, the large mirror over it reflected her fine figure, rich attire, and waving plumes; on the whole she looked very majestic. They paused on reaching the old lady's arm-chair, and gently touching the arm of her relative, Madame Marceau said in a key higher than her usual tones:

"Aunt,—dear Aunt Radegonde."

The Canoness slowly raised her head. Nathalie was captivated at once by the look of her mild blue eyes, still deep in colour, and by the kind and benignant smile which played on her features as she beheld them. A devotee she might be, but she certainly did not seem a rigid one. Her hair, of a silvery white, was parted and smoothed beneath a close lace cap; she wore a dress of black silk brocade, very full and antique in fashion, but fitting her extremely well. On her bosom glittered a large gold cross, the sign of the gay and worldly order to which she belonged. She was evidently very old, but her neat and slender little figure had not suffered from years or lost the nicety of its proportions; she sat and knitted in a very erect fashion. Nathalie thought she had never beheld a being who realized so completely her childish beau ideal of the benevolent fairy.

"I have brought you Mademoiselle Montolieu," said Madame Marceau, again addressing her aunt.

"I am very glad to see her," cheerfully replied the Canoness; "the poor child looks hot; well, it is per

haps early to have a fire; for my part I think the heat a good thing at all times; besides, I am subject to rheumatism, and this old drawing-room is so cold and chill of an evening. Pray take off your bonnet and shawl, my dear, and sit here by me."

There was in her manner a kindness free from Madame Marceau's patronizing courtesy as she now took Nathalie's hand, and with a smile made her sit down on a low luxurious seat by her side, eyeing her all the time, with evident and *naïve* curiosity. Not satisfied with the imperfect glimpse which she thus obtained, she rose, and declaring that " the poor child was still too warm," she very decisively divested Nathalie of both bonnet and shawl, and remained silent and wondering before her. Nathalie was always pretty, but now the warm fire-light gave so deep a bloom to her cheek, to her eyes a light so soft, and to the clear outlines of her whole countenance, so vivid and dazzling a brightness, heightened by her dark hair and sombre attire, that Aunt Radegonde could not but look at her with a mute surprise, which soon subsided into the smiling complacency the sight of youth and beauty inspires in those whom old age has mellowed, not soured. The language of her admiring glance was one beauty learns to read early, and a smile, half-shy, half-pleased, trembled on Nathalie's parted lips. The Canoness turned towards her niece, and, raising herself on tiptoe to reach her ear, she mysteriously whispered with a shrewd nod in the direction of Nathalie:

"She is very pretty."

The young girl coloured deeply and stooped as if to arrange her hair. Madame Marceau did not reply. She too looked at Nathalie with a surprise verging on admiration, but far from implying pleasure.

"I cannot blame poor Charles so much," continued the Canoness, in the same audible key which she mistook for the lowest whisper.

"Hush, aunt," said her niece, with imperious tone and darkening brow.

"We shall see whether our critical Armand will find fault with that face," added the indiscreet Canoness, with visible triumph.

Nathalie looked very much disconcerted. Armand was the christian name of Monsieur de Sainville. Madame Marceau pressed the arm of her aunt, and slightly apologized to the young girl, reminding her that her relative was, as she had informed her, a little deaf. She spoke with a significant look, and in a loud key.

"Deaf!" echoed Aunt Radegonde, much nettled. "Indeed I hear as well as most people; every one is more or less deaf; the only difference is in the quantity. Then as to what I said, I do not think it was so offensive that you need have pinched my arm, Rosalie. In my time, young girls liked to be thought pretty, and when they were pretty, young men were very apt to find it out too."

With a haughty nod, that implied "take that," to her niece, the Canoness walked back to her arm-chair,

stiffly sat down, and rapidly knitted away, erect and dignified. Madame Marceau's lip curled as she looked down at her aunt for a moment; but her glance soon reverted to Nathalie, whom she keenly eyed from head to foot, without seeming to notice that the young girl returned her scrutinizing look. The lady stood facing her, near the fire-place, bare-headed, but with the Indian shawl that seemed as a portion of her dignity, still negligently draped around her person. Nathalie was struck with the resemblance her handsome features bore to those of her son; but the same sharpness of outline and careworn expression marred their beauty. The look which she now cast on the young girl was fixed and moody, but when their eyes suddenly chanced to meet, she smiled very blandly.

"Aunt," said she, addressing her relative in a most gracious tone; "would you believe that this terrible old schoolmistress would scarcely let me see mademoiselle!"

"Indeed!" exclaimed Aunt Radegonde, forgetting her resentment. She quickly looked round at Nathalie, suspended her knitting, cast her head up sideways, in an interrogative listening sort of fashion, probably rendered imperative and habitual by her infirmity and short stature, and thus displayed the profile of a little Gallic *nez retroussé*, strongly indicative of inquisitiveness.

"Mademoiselle Dantin was irritable this evening," quietly said Nathalie, feeling a reply was expected.

"Is she often so?" promptly asked the Canoness.

"Yes, pretty often," answered Nathalie smiling.

"Then you did not like her?"

"We did not agree;—our tempers were different." She spoke coldly; she did not love Mademoiselle Dantin, but she scorned to attack her.

"Ah!" slowly said Aunt Radegonde, who seemed to expect more. "Indeed!" she ejaculated, after a pause; but as this produced nothing, she quietly resumed her knitting.

"There is much to try the temper of persons, in Mademoiselle Dantin's dependant position," charitably observed Madame Marceau. "She is, I suppose, neither better nor worse than most individuals of her class. Mademoiselle Montolieu, let me hope that you will have some refreshment."

Without waiting for objection or reply, she rang the bell. Almost immediately a servant entered, bearing a tray covered with delicacies. Madame Marceau carelessly signed him to place it on a small table near Nathalie. As soon as he retired, she politely pressed her guest to take something; when the young girl complied, to please her, she retired to a low settee, where she reclined majestically, supported by a pile of cushions, not exactly looking at Nathalie, but keeping her within view. But inexperienced as she was, Nathalie had the finesse of a southern and a woman. She felt that she had been introduced into that stately drawing-room, with emblazoned ceiling, and antique furniture, gleaming in the red

fire-light, in order to be dazzled by the sight of unaccustomed magnificence. She had been a little disconcerted at first; now she felt quite composed.

"How sorry I am," observed Madame Marceau, casting a gracious look towards her guest, "that my brother, Monsieur de Sainville, does not spend this evening with us. He would I am sure have been charmed to see Mademoiselle Montolieu. Besides," she thoughtfully added, "when one is so happy as to have a brother, and every one is not so fortunate——"

"Have you got a brother, my dear?" interrupted her aunt, addressing Nathalie with her interrogative air.

"No madame; I have only a sister."

"Does she live in Sainville?" asked the Canoness.

"Generally she does; but now Rose is at Rouen, for a week."

"Rose! what a pretty name! May I ask to know yours; there is much meaning in names; mine is Radegonde, from Sainte Radegonde, one of our earliest queens. Yours is—Nathalie! Ah!" And the Canoness became suddenly meditative.

"Nathalie!" carelessly observed Madame Marceau who had however been listening with evident attention; "Nathalie! Did we not know a lady of that name at Marseilles, aunt."

"Marseilles!" echoed Aunt Radegonde, "why, are you from the south, my dear?" she suddenly asked, as if the idea had not occurred to her before.

"I am a Provençal."

"I might have known it, by your quick piquant way of speaking, so unlike our long nasal Norman accent; you have got a touch of the southern tongue, and very pleasant it is too," she added, smiling.

"Nathalie Montolieu!" abstractedly observed her niece; "yes, the name is decidedly southern."

"Montolieu! is that your other name, my dear? why Rosalie, how can you call that a southern name? I am sure, now you mention it, that it is a Sainville name; have you forgotten the Docteur Montolieu, who attended on my poor Lucile, and who, when you became a widow, wished so much to marry you!"

Madame Marceau gave her aunt a rapid and indignant look, whilst Nathalie quietly observed:

"That Docteur Montolieu was my father; he left Sainville after the death of his first wife, and went to Arles, where he married my mother."

Madame Marceau looked thunderstruck at the unexpected revelation, which so suddenly lessened the distance between herself and the daughter of the man who had formerly aspired to the honour of her hand. She had been many years away from Sainville, and did not so much as know of the doctor's second marriage. Mademoiselle Dantin had dryly informed her, that Nathalie was a Provençal, and pretended to know no more; this fact, confirmed by the young girl's southern accent, had completely misled her. Curious, however, to know who her guest really was, she had, accordingly to her usual tactics, when

there was a secret in the way, put her aunt on the track; the result had far surpassed her wishes and expectations. Indeed there was now something pitiable in her consternation; in the nervous tremor with which she used her vinaigrette, and in the hurried affectation of pleasantry with which she treated her aunt's assertion, and strove to check the torrent of her voluble astonishment at this coincidence.

"Yes, I remember Docteur Montolieu; a good honest man, as you say, aunt—very strange coincidence—extremely so. Mademoiselle Montolieu, I can see you are oppressed with fatigue; allow me to show you to your room."

Nathalie rose, but the Canoness would kiss her very affectionately before she went, and holding her hand, ask her how long her father had been dead; tell her what a very clever man he was; how he had attended her during a long illness, and hint mysteriously that if Rosalie had only wished, she might now have been her —Nathalie's—mamma; to all of which her haughty niece was compelled to listen with powerless indignation, until at length unable to bear more, she hurried the young girl out of the apartment. She smoothed her brow, and resumed all her composure, as the drawing-room door closed upon them, and drowned the sounds of Aunt Radegonde's voice.

Graciously requesting Nathalie to follow her, she led the way up another flight of the wide staircase. The shadowy height of the ceilings, the statues and

objects of art which adorned every recess, and the breadth of the stairs, impressed Nathalie by a certain grandeur of design which belongs to old mansions. On reaching the second-floor landing, lit like the first, they turned into a long and narrow passage or gallery, as the lady called it, with doors on either side. These, as Madame Marceau informed the young girl, in an impressive tone,—these were the doors of the sleeping apartments of the château; they had been inhabited in turn by the whole of the family since the edifice was first erected.

"And this is your room, Mademoiselle Montolieu," she added, opening the last door, and entering a small octagon room hung with blue damask, somewhat faded, and lit by a crystal lamp suspended from the low ceiling. "We are now in one of the four turrets of the château," she continued, nodding and smiling at the young girl. Her look, tone, and bearing bespoke inward complacency.

"How fine the view must be!" cried Nathalie, charmed with her apartment.

"All the views are fine from the château of Sainville," replied the stately lady; "indeed, I may say, they are celebrated. My room is close to yours; I mention this, lest you should imagine yourself secluded like some châtelaine of old, in this 'blue room of the western tower,' which has received more than one real châtelaine. Indeed, I hope you are not afraid of spirits: it is said to be haunted."

Then followed a legend of two beautiful sisters,

Constance and Adelaide de Sainville, who had successively tenanted this apartment, and both died there in the last century. Constance had fitted it up as her oratory, and retired to it daily for meditation and prayer; she died young, pure and happy. After her death, it became the sleeping apartment of Adelaide, a gay and voluptuous lady, who caused the walls, left bare by the ascetic Constance, to be hung with soft silken damask, and introduced the downy couch, the mirror and crystal lamp, preserving only the plain wooden *prie-dieu* as a token of her sister's presence. She, too, it seemed, had died young, but neither resigned nor happy. On the last day of her life she caused herself to be attired in all the gorgeous splendour of the old court costume, surveyed herself in the mirror, and, with many sighs and tears, bade youth and beauty farewell. Her restless spirit was said to haunt the spot. Madame Marceau smilingly assured the young girl this was only an idle report. But though she spoke of the blue room of the western tower, and of the family legends, with seeming carelessness, her studied fluency of speech, as she recalled those associations of the past, betrayed her secret satisfaction and inward pride. She seemed gratified at Nathalie's attention.

"It is wrong in me," she said, "to be detaining you from your rest; good night, Mademoiselle Montolieu; may your first night's sleep under the roof of our house be peaceful and happy."

She spoke with the stately courtesy of a real châ-

telaine, drew the young girl towards her, stooped—for she was much taller—imprinted a kiss on her forehead, and glided out of the room.

It was not until the sound of her steps died away in the passage, and on the distant staircase, that Nathalie felt herself alone. She sat down on a low couch, and leaning back, looked around her with *naïf* and childish interest. The bed stood before her in a deep recess, shrouded by curtains of the clearest muslin; near it stood the wooden *prie-dieu* of the devout Constance, and not far from it, on a low cabinet of carved ebony, the gleaming oral mirror, with its tarnished frame, in which her more earthly sister surveyed herself before she died. These reminiscences charmed the romantic mind of Nathalie. The quaint old china which adorned the mantel-shelf, the pictures of shepherds and shepherdesses in hoops, and even a discoloured mother-of-pearl table and work-box, gave a new interest to everything around her; the sight of her trunk, unperceived till then, suddenly recalled her from the past to the present.

This day had been one of the few eventful days in her quiet life, and it now returned to her in its minutest incidents, with the fuss of the morning; the prize ceremony, at which she laughed, but which amused and interested her, in spite of her laughing; the breaking up, and the parting from a few pet pupils, who crowded around her, and gave her many a farewell kiss. She remembered how, when all was over, she had gone up to her room, and watched from the

window a carriage, which bore away a gay young creature of sixteen, who was to return no more to school; how sad she felt, as that carriage wound along the dusty road, and vanished in the distance; how longingly she looked at the unknown regions of happiness and pleasure, that extended beyond those green hills, and felt like a lady of romance, captive in her solitary bower, guarded by the Dantin dragon. How she wept a little at her loneliness, and then dried her tears, and read till dusk, when she went down to the garden to dream away an hour, until called in for quarrel, reproach, and dismissal. The interview with Charles Marceau, the scene with Mademoiselle Dantin, the meeting with the little Chevalier, the sudden appearance of Madame Marceau, —all came back to her with the vividness of reality, until at length recurred the most startling remembrance of all: she, the poor, dependant girl, was now a guest in the château of Sainville. She looked around her, and smiled to herself, then rose, and opened the window, a real Gothic casement, with lozenge panes in lead casings. The night was dark; she could see nothing, save a bright light burning in the turret facing her. Through the glass panes and thin muslin curtains appeared the figure of a man, slowly pacing the room up and down. He looked taller than Charles Marceau, who, moreover, was not at home. Nathalie's heart beat a little; for though the distance was too great for her to distinguish his features, she felt that she was gazing on the master of Sainville.

She softly closed the window, and, after a little fit of musing, extinguished the lamp, and took possession of the downy bed which had formerly received the beautiful Adelaide. As the young girl sank into her voluptuous couch, and, by the faint, glimmering light which the dying lamp still shed, gazed on the antique, but not ungraceful, furniture of her apartment, she asked herself if some Arabian genie had not transported her there from the bare room she occupied at Mademoiselle Dantin's. None but pleasant visions now flitted before her; everything seemed bright and hopeful as a fairy tale; the sense of security and rest, after the storms and chances of the day, was blended with the pleasurable sensation of her luxurious couch. As she abandoned herself to this indolent repose, thought gradually became less distinct; but her bed faced the window; the light still burned in the turret opposite, and every now and then she caught a glimpse of the dark figure, moving to and fro in its monotonous promenade. The sight exercised an irresistible and mysterious fascination upon her; every time the figure came within view, her look followed it until it vanished. At length, oppressed with fatigue and sleep, her eyes closed; the light still shone opposite. but she heeded it not; dreams, hopes, and mysterious imaginings had faded away; her head reclined on her pillow; her hands lay folded on her bosom: she had fallen into deep and peaceful slumber.

CHAPTER V.

The sun had risen; the sky was serene and blue, and the birds sang on a group of tall poplars near her window, when Nathalie awoke on the following morning. She rose quickly, and merely throwing a shawl around her, she hastened to open the window with childish impatience. Though she prudently kept in the background, lest she might be seen from the garden, or any part of the building, she could still enjoy the cool morning breeze, and the greater portion of the fine prospect below her.

It was a calm morning, silent, and somewhat chill; the sky, of a pale blue, was still tinged with the grey of early morn, save in the east, where the soft, rosy light of dawn still lingered. The trees, some of them already sere and yellow, were seen through a hazy mist, that glittered in the long horizontal rays of light; the freshness of earth and sky told the earliness of the hour.

Beneath her, Nathalie beheld the garden, with its three terraces, the last of which descended to the very edge of the shallow river that wound along Sainville; this garden now looked a small space in the midst of the surrounding grounds. Her glance rested for a while on its gravel walks, trim boxwood hedges, grassplots, and marble statues; then wandered over the grounds, laid out with graceful clumps of trees and groves of stately pine. At a distance, she beheld a little artificial lake, with its dark waters, that seemed to lie sleeping in the solemn shadow of a wide-spreading and melancholy cedar; farther on, in a still more secluded spot, rose a white temple, gleaming amidst the dark foliage of surrounding firs. Save on the side of Mademoiselle Dantin's school, the gardener's art had succeeded in concealing every trace of a boundary. Nathalie could only estimate the extent of the grounds by the landscape beyond; it spread far away on the other side of the winding road; and a fair Norman landscape it was, with low, swelling hills, secluded hamlets in green valleys, and silvery streams, glancing in the morning sun, now gliding visible through fertile plains, or winding far away in dark and overhanging woods. Nathalie looked long and eagerly.

"This cool Normandy is beautiful, after all," she thought, whilst her heart filled with admiration and joy. True joy is almost always religious; and it was before that open window, her hands clasped, her eyes still fixed on the glorious works of God, the

cool breeze fanning her brow, that Nathalie slowly repeated her morning orisons. The house was still silent; she dressed leisurely, with more than usual care, and hesitated long between two very simple muslin dresses, one blue, the other pink; the pink was chosen as most becoming. During the progress of her toilet she never looked at the glass; Mademoiselle Dantin forbade all such toys of vanity to the teachers of her establishment, and long habit enabled Nathalie to do without their aid, but when she had seen that not one ungraceful fold disfigured the light drapery of her attire, that her hair, in spite of its becoming negligence, was quite secure, she turned towards the mirror, and wondered with a smile, "if Adelaide de Sainville had been so very much more beautiful."

Unlike those heroines who are as unconscious of their own loveliness as is a lamp of the light it diffuses, Nathalie knew very well that she was handsome, and often rejoiced in the consciousness of her fresh and youthful beauty, which, though it had failed to soften the morose schoolmistress, rendered her, and this also she knew, very pleasant and delightful in the eyes of others. But personal vanity was, after all, her least defect; she had other faults far more serious, far more fatal to herself and others, and without which this story need never have been written.

A thin, sallow but smartly-attired femme-de-chambre, in fantastic cap and extravagantly small apron, disturbed her reflections.

"Mon Dieu!" she observed with the fluency of speech and elegant precision of accent of the Parisian, "I hope I have not disturbed mademoiselle. Madame would be in despair. Madame only sent me to know whether mademoiselle needed my assistance, and would breakfast in her own room or in the salle-à-manger."

She spoke thus with a rapid look that comprised everything in the room from the least straggling article of dress down to Nathalie's solitary trunk. The young girl thanked her quietly, said she would breakfast below, and followed down stairs the polite femme-de-chambre, who offered to show her the way. She found the Canoness and her niece alone in the dining-room, a wide and cheerful-looking apartment on the ground floor, with a large glass door that led into a small quadrangular court, beyond which extended the garden. Aunt Radegonde nodded to Nathalie with smiling welcome; Madame Marceau did not see or appear to see her until she stood by her side. She then exclaimed:

"Mademoiselle Montolieu!" with an apologetic start, half rose from her chair, held out the tips of her fingers to Nathalie with stately grace, and, sinking back in her seat, "hoped she had slept well." She hoped with a tone and look that said every one did sleep well, or ought to sleep well in the château of Sainville. With a smile Nathalie thanked her: "her sleep was always good." "Indeed!" said Madame Marceau, with a peculiar look; perhaps she

thought it vulgar, as it no doubt is, to sleep soundly; at all events she drew out and applied the vinaigrette.

Good breeding and refinement, or rather the externals of these qualities, are generally considered as wholly precluding those vulgar manifestations of ill-temper, rudeness, impertinence, and similar feelings, which the unsophisticated display with such perfect frankness. But it does not thence follow that the well-bred and refined have not their little spites, little envious feelings, little assumptions of consequence to gratify; indeed they do gratify them very freely; all the difference lies in the manner; for there is a finish, a delicacy of touch in the polite impertinence of the well-bred which the under-bred may envy, but must never hope to attain. The slight that can be conveyed in a glance, in a gracious smile, in a wave of the hand, is often the *ne plus ultra* of art: what insult is so keen or so keenly felt as the polite insult which it is impossible to resent?

Madame Marceau, without being a very clever woman, had some talent and proficiency in this amiable accomplishment. She could put down any one, especially another woman, in the most gracious manner. She never was rude; indeed she was always studiously polite, courteous and stately, as so great a lady should be. Her manner was easy, her speech was fluent, her voice was soft; but her grace was only manner; her courtesy sprang from jealous pride. When the fortunes of her family were at their lowest

ebb, Rosalie de Sainville had married a rich plebeian merchant of Hâvre, whose speedy ruin and death left her the bitter regret of a useless *mésalliance*. The sudden restoration of family dignity effected by her brother, awoke in all its strength her embittered and long-repressed pride. In spite of her long line of ancestors she had still something of the *parvenue;* she felt more jealous of her original position than if she had never descended from it; others might afford to be simple and careless of rank; she felt that she could not, especially with Nathalie. Two sins lay at the young girl's door: she had attracted the attention of Charles Marceau; worse still, she was the daughter of a man who, in Madame Marceau's fallen fortunes and humbled state, had, without undue presumption, hoped to make her his wife.

The breakfast, at which Monsieur de Sainville did not appear, was a plain meal. Madame Marceau held *bourgeois* abundance in horror; but it was served in costly Sèvres porcelain, on silver salvers, with the crest of the Sainvilles. Nathalie bore the studied politeness of her hostess with perfect calmness; she received the courtesy as genuine, and allowed the impertinence to drop all harmless at her feet. The repast, though thus converted into a sort of tilt *avec armes courtoises*, was quiet enough. The naïve curiosity and garrulousness of the Canoness amused Nathalie, but evidently provoked her niece, who coloured, and bit her lip at every fresh indiscretion of Aunt Radegonde. As soon as breakfast was

over, Madame Marceau proposed a walk in the garden, to Nathalie, who readily assented. The Canoness seemed willing to accompany them, but her niece reminded her, in her kindest tones, "that those early walks always fatigued her so much." Aunt Radegonde yielded, with evident regret.

The garden was laid out in the stately style of Louis XIV's reign. Broad gravel walks surrounded quaintly-shaped plots of flowers; low hedges of box-wood, cut close, with niches for statues of heathen deities, crossed one another in intricate windings, or extended into little avenues, ornamented on either side with long rows of stiff orange-trees, in their green boxes, and a sparkling *jet d'eau* rose into the air from a large marble fish-pond in the middle of the first terrace. Notwithstanding the monotony of this style of gardening, which made it quite a relief when they came to a secluded grass-plot, with its solitary nymph, Nathalie was struck with its antique majesty and grandeur of design, both of which at once seemed to carry her back to the stately age of the magnificent Louis XIV. Madame Marceau, who paced the broad walks with slow step and erect majesty of bearing, smiled complacently at her frankly-expressed admiration.

"Yes," she carelessly observed, "this old gardening is, as you say, very characteristic. This garden was designed by the famous Le Nôtre. It suits the style of the château; *Renaissance*, as you know, of course. On the spot which the present building

occupies, once stood a rude Gothic pile, erected by Hugo, first sire of Sainville; for we never had a title in our family; we are the De Sainvilles—no more."

"Like the old Rohans of Brittany," demurely said Nathalie, quoting the old motto, "Roi ne puis; Prince ne daigne; Rohan je suis."

"Precisely," replied Madame Marceau, much gratified. "You have quite a knowledge of history, Mademoiselle Montolieu, and you are right; titles are the gifts of kings; but what court favour can bestow blood and race?"

"I wonder where you got your plebeian name of Marceau?" thought Nathalie, glancing at the proud lady, who continued:

"Armand de Sainville erected, under the reign of Francis I, the present château, on which his scutcheon and motto still appear."

"Pray what is the true sense of that motto?" asked Nathalie.

Madame Marceau shook her head and smiled.

"A sensitive point, Mademoiselle Montolieu—a sensitive point," she significantly replied. "The vulgar legend, which you have no doubt heard, says that this only desire was one of love, but it is not so."

"Indeed!"

"No, Mademoiselle Montolieu, it is not so. The truth is," she added, with great candour, "that we are the most obstinate, *têtu* race in all Normandy. When we wish for a thing, no matter what,—say a horse, a picture, a piece of land, anything, in short,—we must

have it, no matter at what price; indeed, we will have it. It is just the same when we oppose a thing; that thing cannot take place; all our energies go against it; we oppose that thing, in short."

"Extraordinary firmness," said Nathalie, with ill-concealed irony.

"No, Mademoiselle Montolieu; I beg your pardon; no, it is not firmness," said Madame Marceau, with dignified denial. "Heaven forbid that I should thus screen our fatal hereditary failing. No; it is mere obstinacy, mere haughty will—the will of the De Sainvilles."

"Why, madam, you will make me feel quite timid," observed Nathalie, smiling.

"Nay, nay, I hope not," graciously rejoined the elder lady; "I assure you we are far from wishing to inspire such feelings; besides, you must not think that we are merely obstinate. No, my dear Mademoiselle Montolieu," she added, bending her dark and searching glance on the young girl's frank face," we can indeed be enemies; but we must be provoked: and, believe me, to those who confide in us, we can be friends,—true friends."

She familiarly drew Nathalie's arm within her own, and softly laid her handsome hand, all sparkling with jewels, on the young girl's, as she thus addressed her, with much emotion. The look, tone, and gesture were so significant, that Nathalie felt as if a reply were expected; but as she did not happen to be in a mood to answer so much condescension suitably, she

remained silent. They had reached by this the end of the first terrace, and were going to descend a flight of steps that led to the second, when Madame Marceau, who kindly attributed the young girl's silence to timidity, paused, to let her look at the fine prospect over the surrounding grounds. She listened to her expressions of admiration with as much complacency as if she had been the exclusive mistress of all they beheld.

"We are making great improvements," said she, speaking, as usual, in the plural number, and in her own stately way; "planting trees, whose growth we shall never see; but as the property remains in the family, that is not of much consequence."

"I had always understood," heedlessly observed Nathalie, "that Monsieur de Sainville was the last of his name."

Madame Marceau bit her lip, but drew herself up with cool *hauteur*.

"Monsieur de Sainville may be the last of his name," she drily replied; "but though he has no child, and does not intend marrying, he has a nephew, Mademoiselle Montolieu, who succeeds, of course, not only to the family property, but, what is far more important, to the family name. Well, André, what is it?" she added, somewhat sharply.

This question was addressed to a sun-burnt looking man, a gardener, seemingly, and who now stood before Madame Marceau in a respectful attitude. "I have taken the liberty of addressing madame,"

said he, in a submissive tone, "in the hope that madame would be kind enough to intercede for me."

"Well, what is it?" said the lady, smiling encouragingly.

"Oh! if I only knew it, I assure madame that I should not complain; but it is hard to be dismissed for neglect of orders, without so much as knowing what order has been neglected. Yet if madame would only speak for me, monsieur would perhaps relent for the sake of my wife and children."

Madame Marceau looked disconcerted for a moment; but she soon recovered with a cough, and observed, with dignified gravity:

"André, you know us; we are just, liberal masters, but we require, we exact obedience. I verily believe we would sooner forgive dishonesty itself than neglect of orders. I think I told you so expressly when you entered our service; I feel sorry for you, but you must leave."

"But surely, madame will feel how hard it is to go this very day; to be sure monsieur has been extremely liberal, and told the steward to give me not only my due, but much more; still it is hard to leave one's work unfinished; there is a whole plantation that another will only spoil, I am sure. If I could only have had longer notice, and if monsieur had not been so strict in saying that I must leave this very day——"

"Impossible, André," interrupted Madame Marceau; "it is our maxim, our settled principle,—rather

to pay double what we owe than to keep a servant with whom we feel dissatisfied. You have been treated on that principle; I feel sorry for you; but we cannot break through such rules for any individual case."

"But perhaps madame, who knows all about it, will be good enough to tell me what orders I have neglected," persisted André. "I should have asked monsieur himself if he had not left the château so early; and the steward assured me monsieur had only said 'neglect of orders.' I should always feel grateful if madame would only tell me."

Madame Marceau drew herself up with mysterious majesty.

"We are not in the habit of giving explanations," said she, coldly; "you can go, André; we wish to continue our walk. Tell your wife to speak to Amanda before she leaves; Amanda will, I dare say, have something for her. We wish you well, André, but our rules and principles must be carried out."

A wave of the hand told the supplicant that he was dismissed.

"Poor fellow!" ejaculated Madame Marceau, as he left them; "I really compassionate his case, but some faults are positively quite unpardonable."

A quick step in the gravel walk behind them caused Madame Marceau to look round as she spoke thus. The new-comer was the elegant lady's maid.

"Madame," said she, hastily addressing her mistress.

"Amanda," severely interrupted Madame Marceau, "how is this? Have I not made it a particular request that my morning walk should never be interrupted? But this is not the only recent instance of neglect of orders I have discovered. Why it was only this morning I perceived the thing I had expressly asked you to do had been omitted. Amanda, I may say, and you probably know it, every one indeed knows it, that justness mingled with due strictness is our family peculiarity. We are kind masters, we pay well, but obeyed we will be. Amanda, why did you not put the Valenciennes lace quilling around my morning gown?"

"I am sure," demurely said Amanda, "that disrespect of madame's orders was the last thing I intended; but I would not put on the quilling until I had appealed to madame's excellent taste. For as I was saying, my late mistress, Madame la Comtesse d'Onesson, would never allow me to put any quilling to her morning gowns. She would not hear of such a thing, even in her last illness."

"Madame d'Onesson had her way and I have mine," frigidly said Madame Marceau; "I beg that in future you will attend to my orders; there is André, whom we have been compelled to dismiss for similar negligence. It is extraordinary, but really servants do not seem to understand that we have them to do that which we request to have done. And now, may I know why, in spite of my prohibition, you have interrupted my walk?"

"Only to give madame this letter," modestly replied Amanda, respectfully handing a letter to her mistress as she spoke; "and I am sure, if the man who brought it had not said it was from Monsieur Charles and very important, I should never have taken the liberty of breaking through madame's express rules; for, as I was saying, we all know that madame is as strict as she is generous."

Madame Marceau coughed a mollified cough, and slightly apologizing to Nathalie, she opened and read the letter. Her countenance darkened as she perused the contents.

"Where is the man who brought this?" she asked, in her sharpest tones.

"In the hall, waiting for madame's answer."

"Mademoiselle Montolieu, will you excuse me; I find I must go in, and it would be a sin to ask you to return to the house on so fine a morning."

Nathalie having declared that she would indeed greatly prefer continuing her walk, she was left alone. She thoughtfully descended the steps leading to the second terrace, wondering why the letter from her son had annoyed Madame Marceau so much, and whether it bore any reference to herself.

She found that this second terrace was laid out in the same antique style which distinguished the first. A low wall covered with ivy, and partly concealed by a semicircle of evergreens, extended between the flights of steps that led down to the terrace on either side. Attracted by a low plashing sound, Nathalie

stepped within the space thus inclosed. She found herself in a narrow grass plot, with a plain stone fountain in the centre. A clear, slender jet of water rose into the air, and fell down again into its shallow basin with the sound she had heard. In a low, broad niche, hollowed out of the ivied wall, reclined the figure of a sculptured nymph. One arm supported her head, the other hung down loosely by her side; her eyes were closed; her marble features expressed the serenity of sleep; the whole attitude was one of deep repose. A beehive stood close by. Nathalie paused and wondered as she looked, in what consisted the charm of this narrow spot. In its seclusion, and the sense of solitude by which it was accompanied—in the dark and melancholy foliage of those northern trees—in the fair image of sleep, hallowing all around, and seemingly lulled to its deep slumbers by the low sound of falling waters and the bee's murmuring hum—lay that charm, unexplained, though deeply felt.

Another flight of steps led Nathalie to the end of the garden, if garden it might be called, being now a mere grassy slope bounded by the river, and extending without further barrier into the grounds. On her left, she beheld at a distance the wall which divided Monsieur de Sainville's property from Mademoiselle Dantin's garden. On her right, she could see nothing save wide lawns, with groves of spreading beech-trees, dark masses of the pyramidal pine, and the little lake shining in the distance.

As she walked down to the water's edge, stepping

into the high and waving grass which filled the air with its wild fragrance, a whole crowd of tiny winged insects arose on her path. She paused near the hollow trunk of a decayed willow; near her a group of silver-leaved aspens trembled in the sun with a low rustling sound; the water flowed quietly in its pebbly bed; whilst around was heard the ceaseless hum of the bees from the neighbouring hive. On the opposite bank, formed by the wide arch of two large beech-trees, whose spreading shadow slept over the dark yet transparent waters of the river at her feet, extended a rural landscape of calm loveliness. A narrow pasture valley, sheltered by green hills; a herd of cattle grazing quietly in the cool morning shade; the light mists fading away before the early sun; no human dwelling visible, but everything wrapt in the silence and repose of the hour,—formed a scene so tranquil and so fair that it instantly reminded Nathalie of a picture by Claude Lorraine which she had seen as a child in an old château of Provence. The absence of all ungraceful objects—the clear, golden-coloured light—the deep and almost holy serenity of his favourite scenes—marked everything she now saw. She was turning away from this lovely prospect with regret, when she suddenly stopped short, as if rooted to the earth. Charles Marceau stood before her.

With the exception that this was day, and that it was evening when she saw him before, Nathalie might have imagined this to be the continuation of their former interview. The young man looked as

cool and composed as when in Mademoiselle Dantin's garden; more so, indeed, he could not look. He stood in the same attitude, with his face turned towards Nathalie. His features, thin, pale, and yet strikingly handsome, looked thinner and paler from the mass of dark hair which fell down almost to his shoulders. The expression of the brow and mouth instantly reminded Nathalie of Madame Marceau; but the eyes, large, clear, and hazel, like her's, had another look. This might be from the eyelids, which drooped rather too much, or from the nearness and fixedness of the pupils, which now rendered it difficult for Nathalie to meet his glance, and made her feel not so much that he was looking at her, as that he looked in the direction in which she stood. In return to his deep salutation, she gave him a frigid bow. He stood so exactly before her that it was not easy for her to walk on.

"I see you are still deeply offended," said he, in that low and musical tone which, in spite of her anger, had struck her on the preceding evening; "alas! can penitence for a past error avail nothing?"

He paused, as if expecting an answer. Nathalie, however, with serious mien and downcast look, gave him none.

"Pray remember," he continued, "how I stood placed. We often met: I might look, but never speak; I might write, yet hope for no reply; I loved you, but might not tell it."

Nathalie coloured, and hastened to interrupt him.

"I will forgive last evening's intrusion," said she, coldly, "on condition it is never mentioned again."

"You forgive me," he replied; "is that all?"

Nathalie looked up with surprise. She met his look; it had now the keen and watchful expression which had already struck her. Seeing that she did not speak, he continued—

"We are told to forgive our enemies. Is there, for those that love us, no other feeling than forgiveness?"

"I understand you, sir," said Nathalie, eyeing him with a firm, clear look; "but I am not bound to answer a feeling I never sought, nor to feel gratitude——"

"Gratitude!" he interrupted, with something like scorn; "who speaks of gratitude? I detest gratitude—it is only fit for slavish souls, whom benefits can win. It is a feeling I have never known, and care not to exact—least of all from you—you," he added, in a lower tone, "who inspire me with another ambition, and far other hopes."

Nathalie looked annoyed and disdainful.

"I believe," quietly continued Charles Marceau, "that by speaking thus I impress you unfavourably. Forgive me; I must speak as I feel, and that is within no sphere of conventional or formal rules. You may think me presumptuous, yet trust me, I do not mistake your present feelings. I will not say that you hate me, that I am disagreeable to you; I believe I am totally indifferent to you, and that, compara-

tively speaking, you care no more for me than for the grass beneath your feet."

The last words were uttered with much bitterness; yet, to Nathalie's surprise, the young man composedly resumed:

"I am content it should be so; I am content to find you proud and disdainful, if such is your whim. A hundred times sooner would I see you thus, than find you yielding a feeble return to feelings you will never understand until the day arrives when you fully share them."

"And that day, sir," sharply replied Nathalie, who felt irritated at the tone he had taken, "is, I promise you, still far distant."

Charles did not seem alarmed at this threat. He smiled again. "Once more," said he, "I must beg of you to forgive me if my speech is not confined within conventional limits. Nothing is further from my intention than to utter a word calculated to offend you. If, cold as you are now, I yet express a belief in your future affection, that belief is not founded on my own merits. I trust to the depth and fervour of my love for return."

"We will not argue that point," coldly said Nathalie; "Madame Marceau is waiting for me. Be so good as to allow me to proceed."

"One moment more, I beseech you," submissively said Charles Marceau; "I depart to-day for Paris: many months must elapse before I behold you again. Whilst your thought and image remain ever present

to me, may I hope you will sometimes remember me?"

Nathalie, highly indignant at this request, could not repress the taunt which rose to her lips.

"Sir," said she, with an ironical smile, destined to punish his presumption, "you have so much faith and hope at your command, that you can well dispense with so paltry an auxiliary as memory."

"You are severe," bitterly replied Charles Marceau, whilst his cheek took a sallower tinge; "but," he added, with a fixed look, which made her colour rise, "you cannot and shall not prevent me from loving you, and that with a passion and fervour which, could they be revealed by words, would not, perhaps, leave you quite so calm and cold as I leave you now."

He turned away without another word or look.

CHAPTER VI.

Nathalie remained standing in the same place as if rooted to the spot by indignant amazement. Her colour rose and she bit her lip, alike vexed and astonished at herself, for having allowed the young man to proceed so far unchecked.

The incident of the letter recurred to her as particularly significant: she could not doubt that it was the means Charles Marceau had taken to meet her. The concealment of which he made use showed her very plainly the light in which his family viewed his attachment.

"They need not fear," she thought, with secret scorn; "the poor teacher of Mademoiselle Dantin's school will not find it so hard to live without the heir of the great Sainville race, who, though so daring with her, can, it seems, be timid enough with them."

Not caring for a longer walk she returned to the château. She would willingly have proceeded to her

own room at once, but the Canoness meeting her on the staircase made her enter the drawing-room; Madame Marceau was not present. Aunt Radegonde took her usual place, made the young girl sit down on the low seat by her side, began to knit, and asked how she liked the garden.

"Yes," she thoughtfully observed, when Nathalie had said how much she liked it; "yes, our old château is a pleasant place; here was I born and bred, and so were Armand and Rosalie; and here I lived until my poor brother died, when Armand said at once the place must be sold to help to cover his father's debts, and passed his word to the creditors to work out the rest, no matter at what cost. He went away for years,—we had to go to Hâvre; yet I never have understood how Sainville could be sold."

"And was it sold?" asked Nathalie.

"I suppose so; for other people came and we left; but they changed nothing. This room looks just as it looked on the day when I stood at the door and turned round to take a last glance."

"How glad you must have been to return," said Nathalie, touched at her simplicity and frankness.

The Canoness laid her little hand on the young girl's shoulder, and looked wistfully into her face. "My dear child," she sadly replied, "may you never know how sad the place we once loved best may become. Sorrowful as I was when I left, I left not alone; but I was alone when I returned. I found nothing but gaiety going on,—but it was mirth that

saddened me: the house was full of company,—to me it seemed vacant."

She looked around her, and her eyes filled with tears; but age loves not to dwell on sorrowful recollections,—the cloud soon passed away from the cheerful features of the Countess. She urged Nathalie to speak, and peremptorily forbade her to call her Madame, which she pronounced much too formal.

"Though, to be sure," she added, drawing herself up, "I have a right to the title, being a Countess. I am not, mademoiselle,—which would be ridiculous at my age,—but Madame Radegonde de Sainville, and so the servants, whom I keep at a great distance, always call me: but you,—let me see,—do you mind calling me Marraine? I might very well be your godmother. Indeed, I feel almost confident that if your poor father had married some one of Sainville, instead of going off to Provence for a wife, I should have been your godmother. Well, shall it be Marraine, or is your real godmother still living?"

"No, she was my aunt, and died three years ago in Provence."

"And have you no friends in Sainville, Petite?"

"None save my sister, who was brought up here," replied Nathalie, smiling at the familiar name the Countess had already found for her.

"But your sister is very fond of you, I am sure," shrewdly rejoined Aunt Radegonde, with an air of mingled bonhomie and finesse. "Oh! I know what an elder sister is," she added, as Nathalie smiled in

reply. "When your aunt died in Provence, and you must have been very young then, for indeed you are a child still,"—Nathalie looked a little indignant, —"our good sister Rose took the little orphan, and became to her more like a second mother than like a strange sister; only I cannot understand why she let her be at that sour Mademoiselle Dantin's?"

"Because Rose is a dependant, like myself," replied Nathalie, "and resided with an aunt far more sour than Mademoiselle Dantin; all she could do was to find me in her school a situation I was glad to get."

"Depend upon it, Petite, your sister acted for the best; yes, your sister Rose is your friend," she emphatically added.

"She is, indeed; and though she so often finds fault with me, I never can feel angry."

"What does she say then?"

"That I am proud, rebellious, and resentful; that I love impossibilities and disdain the real."

"Your sister is a little severe," said the Canoness, giving Nathalie a puzzled look, "but though she of course means well, all this is not quite correct, is it?"

"Indeed it is," frankly replied Nathalie; "but then Rose has a right to be severe; she is nearly perfect herself."

"It is quite proper you should think so," decisively said the Canoness; "but for my part, I do not doat on perfect people. I know a person of that sort, one who seldom or ever does wrong; but for all that you

cannot love that person. That person, my dear, never scolds, never gets into a passion, never says a cross word, but just acts in a quiet, underhand sort of way that is perfectly chilling. You never know how you are getting on with that person; by which I do not mean to say that person is deceitful. No, but that person is just like a looking-glass; look in front as long as you like, it is all very well; but attempt to turn round, to peep behind, you see—nothing. You must not imagine, my dear," added the Canoness, after a brief pause, and looking at Nathalie very fixedly, "that I am talking of any one in this house,—no," she shrewdly observed, "that person is far away." This assertion was uttered quite triumphantly.

"That person must be very remarkable," thoughtfully said Nathalie attentively looking at Aunt Radegonde as she spoke.

"Remarkable! well no, not at first sight, at least; and yet that person is no common individual."

"You said perfect," quickly rejoined Nathalie.

"Well, perfect was perhaps too strong a word. Yet it is difficult to find fault with that person: and a person who in spite of all you can say manages to be always in the right is very nearly perfect. Only it is a provoking sort of perfection; I do not like it," very emphatically added Aunt Radegonde; "do you?"

"Not at all," replied Nathalie quite as heartily.

Here the voice of Madame Marceau was heard on the landing, talking to one of the servants.

Aunt Radegonde looked alarmed, bent down and exclaimed in a hurried whisper:—

"My dear child, do not let Madame Marceau know I spoke to you about that person."

"Is Madame Marceau that person?" rapidly thought Nathalie, as the lady entered the room; but the aspect of the ruffled brow, and the sound of the sharp irritated voice as she recorded the delinquency of some servant, did not give the idea of one who never spoke a cross word, or never scolded.

"Really," she said with anything but a bland voice, "servants do not seem to appreciate the privilege of living in a family like this; they will not obey."

"When we had but one servant——" began Aunt Radegonde.

"The dismissal of André has produced no effect," quickly interrupted her niece.

"André! Do you say André is dismissed?"

Madame Marceau majestically seated herself and sententiously replied in answer to the eager look and inquiry of her aunt, "that André was dismissed."

"Why, so?" asked the Canoness looking much chagrined; "he is so honest and industrious."

"Very true, aunt, but we require obedience in our servants."

"What order has he neglected? I am sure the poor fellow will only be too glad to repair his fault."

"We are not in the habit of entering into explanations with our servants," replied her dignified niece.

"But what has he done, Rosalie?"

Madame Marceau looked mysterious.

"Ay, there it is!" ironically exclaimed Aunt Radegonde, rocking herself in her chair; "the man is sent away, he does not know why,—I do not know why, — do not believe you know why,—nobody knows, in short. You call that will, *I* call it tyranny. You may tell any one I said so if you like; if others are afraid, I warn any one who likes to hear, that I am not."

She spoke loudly and looked defiant.

"Aunt," patronizingly said her niece, "you surely ought to be accustomed to the manifestations of our family peculiarity—*will*, though you do not possess so much of it."

"I have as much will as any one," sharply interrupted the Canoness.

"Be it so," replied Madame Marceau, with a gracious smile and an Olympic inclination of the head, "be it so, dear aunt; but as I was saying, you ought to be accustomed to the manifestations of our family peculiarity—will. You know my impartiality; I do not justify this inexorable will;—I deplore it. But such we are, and all I can say is, I feel truly sorry for those who unfortunately suffer from this peculiarity."

A daughter of the Atridæ could not have lamented with more solemn dignity the melancholy fatality attending her race.

"I tell you," testily rejoined Aunt Radegonde, "it is not will, but the despotism and caprice I know

of old.—There!" With this last bold defiance she resumed her knitting.

"My good aunt," replied Madame Marceau, becoming more polite and more cool, "excuse me: energy is not despotism; justice is not caprice. These qualities have restored our family to its pristine splendour;—they will keep it there. We may regret that those inflexible virtues should interfere with the happiness of any person, howsoever humble that person may be; we may also regret to be misunderstood, by our own relatives especially, but we really cannot help it."

"I never meant—" began Aunt Radegonde, looking flurried.

"Pray, do not mention it; it is quite immaterial," kindly interrupted Madame Marceau. And having thus put down her aunt she turned towards Nathalie, asked how she had liked the garden; was sure she would like the grounds; informed her that the domain of Sainville was much admired, and hoped to have many pleasant walks over it with Mademoiselle Montolieu. The Canoness joined in the hope, and looked at her niece, who looked at the wall. But Aunt Radegonde, who seemed anxious to be restored to favour, persisted.

"Yes," she said, "we shall have many pleasant walks, all three, or rather all four together; for Armand will accompany us, and he talks so well! Ah! Petite, you should hear him and his sister, sometimes!"

"My brother is indeed a man of varied acquirements," condescended to observe Madame Marceau, without, however, looking at her aunt. "I regret that he should be gone to Marmont; but he is to be home at five. I have no doubt he will be greatly pleased to become acquainted with Mademoiselle Montolieu."

"How long is this to last?" impatiently thought Nathalie, who began to feel heartily wearied of Madame Marceau's protecting grandeur and strained courtesy.

It lasted the whole day, which appeared to the young girl one of the longest she had ever spent. Madame Marceau was not one of those talkers who tire out by their inexhaustible volubility; her language was not trite, common-place, or ridiculous; but she had a way of spreading out her wealth, her state, her lineage, as if these were to be worn at full length, like the robe and ample train of her grandmother. The little she said—for she did not speak much—was all on the theme, more implied, however, than expressed, of her greatness. If Nathalie looked out of the window and admired the fine avenue of trees leading to the château, she was told of how many centuries was their growth, and by which of the Sainvilles they had been planted; if she glanced at a picture, she was informed how long it had been in the family, or if it was a portrait, which of the Sainvilles it represented. In short, the past and present glory of the Sainville race evidently reigned supreme in the

lady's thought. Aunt Radegonde knitted assiduously and spoke very little. She did indeed let out one or two indiscreet observations, but a look, and a "dear aunt," from her niece silenced her effectually.

"What a cheerless day!" she observed towards evening, and she laid down her knitting with a slight yawn.

"Very cheerless indeed," said Nathalie; and glad of some excuse to leave her seat, she rose and went up to one of the large and deep windows that looked on the avenue.

It had been raining all the afternoon and it was raining still. The sky was dark, dreary, and obscured by gloomy clouds that chased each other rapidly along. Gusts of wind bowed the tall trees of the avenue, and the winding road and landscape beyond it could be seen only through the torrents of slanting rain.

"What dreadful weather Armand has for his ride home," observed Madame Marceau, in a tone of concern.

"Perhaps he will not come," said the Canoness.

"My dear aunt," replied her niece, in her sententious way, "we never break a promise; Armand left word that he would be home at five, and at five we must expect him. As for the weather, he has been so great a traveller that I really think he feels indifferent to it."

No more was said until the clock struck five.

"That is strange!" said Madame Marceau with stately surprise.

"*Chère* Petite," observed Aunt Radegonde turning towards Nathalie, "you will take cold near that window."

"I am only looking at the clouds," carelessly replied Nathalie; "they run along the sky so fast that they look like living things."

She lingered a while longer near the window, before resuming her seat by the Canoness.

"Oh! there comes Monsieur de Sainville," said Madame Marceau as the clatter of a horse's hoofs was heard in the avenue below. She looked at the clock impatiently, and when a few minutes had elapsed, left the room. There was a brief silence.

"You will spoil your sight with that embroidery; there is no light," at length observed the Canoness, addressing Nathalie, whose glance seemed rivetted to her work.

"Thank you, I am used to it," she replied in a low and somewhat flurried tone. A step was heard on the staircase; she laid down her work on her lap, then took it up again nervously.

The door opened and Madame Marceau entered alone. Her brow seemed slightly overcast.

"Mademoiselle Montolieu," said she, addressing the young girl in a tone which sounded sharp and irritated, through all its softness and courtesy, "my brother is very anxious to see you. Would you mind accompanying me to the library."

Nathalie rose in some trepidation.

"Where are you taking her?" asked the Canoness.

"Armand wishes to speak to Mademoiselle Montolieu."

"What does he want with her?" pettishly inquired Aunt Radegonde.

"My brother, Monsieur de Sainville, wishes to speak to Mademoiselle Montolieu, his guest," replied Madame Marceau, drawing Nathalie's arm within her own, and speaking with one of her grand airs.

"He could speak to her here," returned the Canoness, who could be pertinacious enough when she chose; "and I do not see why he will have her in the library—unless it be to scare her, as he scares every one," she added, under her breath.

Madame Marceau gave her aunt a look, which made the little Canoness fidget in her chair.

"Really, dear aunt," said she with an affected gaiety, that was intended to conceal a good deal of irritation, "one might think I was leading our young friend to the *antre* of some ogre. Fortunately," she added, with a keen look at Nathalie, "Mademoiselle Montolieu does not share your apprehensions."

The Canoness looked corrected and penitent, and did not venture to breathe another syllable, as the two ladies left the room.

"I suppose," thought Nathalie, as they silently proceeded towards the library, "that Monsieur de Sainville is a second edition of his sister,—a tall, fine man, very stately, very courteous, and very patronizing."

She glanced at her companion as she came to this conclusion, and the lowering expression of Madame

Marceau's brow led her to believe that this interview was little to the lady's taste.

The library was situated on the ground-floor, and the entrance to it faced the door leading to the dining-room. It was soon reached; and as Madame Marceau's hand rested on the bronze door-handle, Nathalie felt the mingled shyness and curiosity of her years blending with a disagreeable feeling of uneasiness, caused by the prospect of meeting one of whom, whether rightfully or not, she had not been led to conceive a very favourable opinion. Her companion smiled, and gave her an encouraging look.

"Pray, Mademoiselle Montolieu," said she, in a low and emphatic tone, "do not feel any uneasiness. We are your friends; we mean you well."

She pressed her hand, and opened the door as she spoke.

The library was a wide apartment very simply furnished, with shelves of books, busts, and a few pictures. A vase filled with choice flowers stood on a large table covered with papers; near it burned a lamp with a clear, cheerful light. A large glass door revealed the garden beyond, with its distant trees now bending before the autumn blast; in the dark sky above already shone a pale and watery moon, ever and anon obscured by passing clouds. The dreary aspect of nature heightened the air of warmth and comfort of everything within.

As the two ladies entered, a gentleman, who was standing near the fire-place, turned round and ad-

vanced to receive them. Madame Marceau walked up to him, leading Nathalie by the hand, and addressing him as her "dear Armand," introduced her companion to him, with great stateliness. She then caused Nathalie to be seated, stood by her chair, uttering in her smooth tones a few common-place remarks, framed a plausible excuse, and retired, leaving the young girl alone with her brother.

"This is very childish," thought Nathalie, as she felt her heart beating rapidly and her cheeks gradually covering over with a crimson flush; and she found her emotion the more inexcusable that a look had told her there was nothing so singular in Monsieur de Sainville's appearance as to excite feelings of uneasiness or alarm.

The master of Sainville did not in the least fulfil the idea which, from the distant glimpses she had formerly obtained of him, and still more from her own recent conjectures, the young girl had formed of his appearance. She had thought to find a tall, dark man, sallow, harsh-featured, rather handsome, but of a severe, forbidding aspect, and long past middle age. But as he stood by the table, near which she sat, eyeing her with a quiet yet penetrating glance, speaking in a rich, harmonious voice, which seemed the gift of the family, and addressing her with that indescribable French ease which in his case was united to great simplicity of manner, she was compelled to confess that nothing could be more different from what she had anticipated or imagined,—nothing espe-

cially more opposed to the showy but unpleasing Madame Marceau.

Monsieur de Sainville was not much above the usual height, and of a spare figure, in which there was nothing to strike the eye. Still less did his countenance seem likely to attract attention; it was neither plain nor handsome; Nathalie was surprised at seeing only a serious face, intellectual indeed, but pale and mild, and still further softened by hair of a light chesnut, and a slight moustache of the same hue. Without being young, he was still in the prime and vigour of life, and evidently much younger than his sister.

"And is this Monsieur de Sainville?" thought Nathalie, looking at him again with inward disappointment. Yet this second glance, though it beheld no more than the first, impressed her very differently.

There was something in the settled pallor of the features, in the breadth and calmness of the brow, in the clear glance of the dark blue eyes, in the decisive arch of the nose, in the firmly-compressed lips and curved chin, and above all, in the well-defined though not harsh outlines of the whole countenance, which no longer gave Nathalie the idea of gentleness. The mild expression which had first struck her, now resembled more a settled and unruffled calm, the result, perhaps, of a disposition serene by nature, and not easily disturbed by outward events, or, as she felt more inclined to think, the only external sign of a

strong and silent will at rest. The whole face forcibly reminded her of a medallion of Bonaparte in her possession; not in beauty, for Monsieur de Sainville was by no means handsome; not in the cast of the features, for his were essentially northern; but in innate power and marble-like repose. Indeed that countenance, which had at first seemed so quiet in character, now looked to Nathalie frought with meaning, but with a meaning she vainly sought to read. She looked and felt baffled; like one who beholds an inscription engraved in unknown characters on a stone tablet; it is there visible, indeed, to the eye, but inscrutable to thought, and though seen, not the less a mystery.

Whilst these thoughts passed rapidly through the young girl's mind, her host continued to address her; he was regretting, in courteous speech, the business which had prevented him from meeting her sooner. To her surprise, he was quite aware of her parentage, and mentioned her father, whom he remembered, in terms of respect and esteem, that gratified her deeply. Indeed he seemed bent on placing her at her ease. When he had succeeded in dispelling her first embarrassment, he gradually dropped into a more business-like manner, polite still, but which, as Nathalie felt, was destined to lead them to the real object of this interview.

"Apologies are weak," said he, addressing her with grave earnestness, "yet I must apologise—I must express my deep regret for what has happened. Until yesterday evening I little suspected that you had been

subjected to annoyance from a member of my family; I should still be as ignorant, had I not met my nephew, as he left Mademoiselle Dantin's garden. To Madame Marceau, his mother, and my sister, I entrusted, as was most fitting, the task of relieving you from an unpleasant and unmerited position. I know this is a delicate subject—perhaps I ought to leave it wholly to Madame Marceau; but I have a principle, from which I do not lightly swerve, always to do that myself which I can really do. If I allude, however, to these circumstances, it is, in the first place, to assure you of my sorrow at the disagreable consequences of my nephew's imprudence; in the second, to hope that you will be so good as to consider this house your home, until a more eligible one offers for your acceptance."

He spoke in a brief, business-like tone, yet with a quiet simplicity, evidently meant to dispel every sense of obligation. Nathalie did not the less feel bound to thank him; he quickly interrupted her.

"Nay," said he, politely still, but quite decisively, "so common-place an act of duty requires no acknowledgments."

Nathalie made no reply. A short embarrassed pause succeeded. Monsieur de Sainville seemed to wish to say something more, yet he remained silent; he left his place, returned to it again, but did not speak. Nathalie felt intuitively that he was looking at her. She glanced up—it was so; but though his look was both fixed and thoughtful, it caused her no

embarrassment: this protracted silence became, however, somewhat awkward.

"I fear, sir," said she, half rising from her seat, "that I am intruding on your leisure."

"No, no," he quickly replied. "To tell you the truth," he added, more leisurely, "our conversation is not yet ended."

Nathalie felt and looked uneasy.

"Some matters," he resumed, in his business-like way, "require frankness; it is then—as, indeed, it almost always is—the most honourable, the most easy course to pursue. I should not have troubled you to come here, Mademoiselle Montolieu, since I could have had the pleasure of seeing you in the presence of my aunt and sister, had I not felt myself bound to communicate to you certain facts which you probably do not know, but which you certainly ought to know. But first I must assure you that over my nephew and his feelings I claim not the least authority. You will therefore understand that, so far as he is concerned, I do not seek, I do not wish to interfere. Nor do I presume to inquire into your private feelings; I only feel that you are my guest, that it is my duty not to allow you to be deceived, even indirectly. All I wish to state is, that my sister has for some time planned a marriage between her son and a friend of hers, Mademoiselle de Jussac; that after agreeing, he has now refused to marry that lady, and that his mother has declared she will never give her consent—with which the law will not yet allow him

to dispense—to his marriage with any other woman. She is determined not to yield, and so is he, for they are much alike in person and in temper; if he has, therefore, deceived himself, so far as to state the contrary to you, believe me he is wholly mistaken. My perfect knowledge of this, the advantage I have over you in years and experience, my position as your host, entitle me, perhaps, to consider myself as standing towards you, for some time at least, in the relation of guardian and friend. I have therefore entered into these explanations, in order that you may know how to guide your actions. You can now weigh the exact cost of what, at your age, is called the happiness of life, of what is often only the dream of a day. You will have time to discriminate the caprice of youth from its sincere feeling. If you doubt, you can easily look on the past as null; if your faith is strong, you can wait, and refuse to let any authority, any human being stand between your feelings and you."

He ceased. Nathalie had heard him in profound silence. Reclining back in her chair, with her hands clasped on her kness, and her eyes fastened on the floor, she had remained as motionless as a statue. But her colour, which came and went, and the irrepressible working of her features, showed that this calmness was only apparent. Yet when she looked up, and met Monsieur de Sainville's eye with a glance as clear and steady, though not so calm as his own, and when, after a brief pause, she answered him, there was in her whole bearing a composure and feminine

dignity she seldom displayed, and which were perhaps drawn forth by the presence of a stranger, not of her own sex, perhaps also by the quiet, business-like manner in which she had been addressed.

"Sir," said she, calmly, "you mean well,—kindly, I should say, and I thank you sincerely; but allow me to observe, that this advice, however excellent—that these explanations, however clear,—were both unnecessary in my case. That Madame Marceau should wish to marry her son to a lady, and that he should refuse to marry that lady, are family matters of no moment to me."

Her colour deepened, and her eyes kindled with rising pride, as she concluded. Monsieur de Sainville gave her a look as searching as it was brief.

"Indeed," said he, slowly; "then I confess I no longer understand in what relation you stand towards my nephew."

"In none whatever," she replied, with laconic haughtiness. "Monsieur Marceau's attentions were never encouraged by me; yet he presumed so far as to write to me, asking for a favourable reply."

"Did you give him any reply?" quietly asked Monsieur de Sainville.

"No! sir," sharply answered Nathalie; "but desirous, I suppose, of exacting an answer, Monsieur Marceau found means of entering the garden of the school. I was requesting him to retire, when Mademoiselle Dantin came up."

Monsieur de Sainville's calm countenance assumed

a peculiar expression : it was not anger, nor yet scorn, but something between both. It lasted for a moment only ; it had vanished when he raised his look towards Nathalie, and said, somewhat briefly :

" And this was all."

He spoke more as if announcing a fact than as if putting a question. But Nathalie felt that her silence might be construed into assent; she hesitated, and looked embarrassed, conscious of his fixed and scrutinizing gaze.

" Sir," she said at length, " I do not wish to leave you under a false impression : in one sense this is not all, for I met Monsieur Marceau in the garden of this house, this morning, by chance."

" By chance !" incredulously echoed Monsieur de Sainville.

" By chance on my part, at least," she warmly replied.

Monsieur de Sainville eyed her quietly, whilst a subdued smile, which annoyed Nathalie more than his supposed insinuation, played for a moment around his severe mouth.

" I assure you," said he, " that I never meant to hint anything likely to wound your delicacy ; but that this meeting was accidental I cannot believe. I regret that even here you should not have been free from annoyance. I shall see," he added, with a slight frown, " that it occurs not again."

" I believe," observed Nathalie, with some hesitation, " that Monsieur Marceau wished to apologize."

Monsieur de Sainville smiled again.

"Permit me to doubt," said he, quietly, "that your acceptance of an apology was the only result he hoped from this interview."

"Which had no other result, sir," rejoined Nathalie, in a quick, nettled tone.

"Nor did I imply that it had," he calmly answered.

Still Nathalie felt anxious to explain.

"It had not even that result, having lasted only a few minutes. Indeed, Monsieur Marceau left me in a fit of pique, because," she added, colouring, as she felt this explanation had been unsolicited, and was perhaps unneeded, "because, in short, I did not sympathize with that which I really could not understand."

Monsieur de Sainville stroked his chin, and looked down.

"I regret," said he, after a pause, "having laboured under an impression which has evidently been disagreeable to you; but the truth is, I plainly understood that the only obstacle to my nephew's attachment rested with his mother."

Indignant amazement kept Nathalie silent for a few seconds, during which her colour deepened, until it covered her features with a burning glow.

"He said so—he dared to say so!" she passionately exclaimed; but tears of anger and shame rose to her eyes, her lips trembled, and she could say no more.

Monsieur de Sainville waited for several minutes,

during which he allowed Nathalie's excitement to subside, and watched her attentively.

"I should regret this frankness," he said at length, "did I not feel you have a right to know the truth."

He spoke with emphasis. Nathalie turned towards him, looking as she felt,—touched and grateful.

"You have been kind, sir," said she, with that spontaneousness which is so well expressed by the untranslateable French word *effusion*, "very kind; I thank you truly."

"Are you quite sure of that?" said he, eyeing her composedly; "because," he continued, answering her quick, startled look, "your countenance is more frank than you imagine; its meaning, if I read it rightly a while ago, was that the spirit of my observations was far from being acceptable to you. Now I assure you that I was not actuated by the indiscreet wish of ascertaining anything you might think fit to conceal, but by the simple desire of doing you justice; for, indeed," he continued, after a brief pause, "I may say that the manner in which you listened to the explanations I then thought myself justified in offering, had already convinced me of that which your words have confirmed; namely, that my nephew had mistaken his own hopes for your acquiescence."

There was something in this speech that jarred on Nathalie's ear. She fancied, in her sensitive pride, that Monsieur de Sainville was too much pleased at there being no tie between his nephew and herself. Desirous of showing him that she was quite as ready

and anxious as he could be to repudiate the idea, she said, somewhat proudly:

"May I ask, sir, if Madame Marceau labours under this impression?"

"It shall be my care to undeceive her," he briefly replied.

"But, sir," continued Nathalie, "I begin to feel doubts as to the propriety of accepting even your kind offer."

"Why so?" he composedly inquired.

"I feel as if my presence here could scarcely be agreeable."

"And pray how can this be?" he asked, with a smile.

"Madame Marceau will perhaps be reminded—I mean to say—indeed, I should not like to be the cause——"

She stopped short, bit her lip, and looked vexed at having begun that which it was not quite easy for her to conclude.

There was a pause, for Monsieur de Sainville took his time to observe, with that smile, half kindly, half ironical, which had already annoyed the young girl:

"I believe you allude to my nephew; but he is now precisely where it is best for him to be—in Paris, prosecuting his legal studies. If he is wise, he will remain there."

Still Nathalie seemed willing to raise some objection. Monsieur de Sainville anticipated her.

"Believe me," said he, gravely, "it shall be my care that nothing or no one annoys you under this roof."

He said not in plain speech "this is my house, and you are my guest;" but his look and manner implied it; and Nathalie felt a strange mixture of pleasure and embarrassment to think that it was so. She felt that there was kindness in that calm face, which now looked down upon her, a kindness she knew not how to acknowledge.

She was little aware that there was no need of acknowledgment; that the most finished and graceful thanks would not have been so expressive as the look, half shy, half confident, which she now turned towards Monsieur de Sainville; for the charm of the ingenuous embarrassment of youth is seldom lost on those of maturer years, nor did it seem to be lost on him, as he eyed the young girl with a sedate, thoughtful glance; and though he did not smile now, his grave features were softened and relaxed. Nathalie felt intuitively that the interview had lasted long enough, and she rose from her seat.

"I am sure, sir, that you are very kind," said she, hesitatingly, and colouring at the earnest tone, as well as at the homeliness of the compliment; "and I feel truly grateful," she added, after a pause.

Perhaps as she said this, her manner became constrained, or it may be that the last word broke the charm; for as it was uttered, Monsieur de Sainville's

countenance suddenly altered back to the old expression.

"Pray let there be no undue sense of obligation," said he, with his cold politeness; and, perceiving her wish to depart, he led her out of the room.

CHAPTER VII.

"So this is Monsieur de Sainville," thought Nathalie, as she closed the door of the library behind her and walked up stairs.

She felt disappointed; for there was nothing, as she had expected there would be, singular in her host. She also felt chilled and repelled. At first she thought this was because he had questioned her too closely. On reflection she perceived that he had put only one question to her; what she had said had been mentioned of her own accord. With haughty surprise she now asked herself why? Had his frankness been such as to win frankness in return? Nay, for he had told her exactly what he had wished to mention from the first; not one word more. He had laid facts before her, without comment, without advice, without giving her any clue to his own feelings. How he felt with regard to his nephew's conduct, how he would view an engagement between Charles Marceau and

herself, were matters of which she was as ignorant now as before she entered the library. She had said much, but had learned nothing save that the providential interference of which Madame Marceau had so freely taken the merit, was in reality attributable to her brother, a gentleman serious in aspect, in manner calm, if not cold. She wondered if he was always so, and if this was all. The Canoness and her niece were both in the drawing-room, when she entered it, and both looked at her with evident curiosity. She silently sat down by the arm-chair of the elder lady.

"You see, aunt," observed Madame Marceau, with an assumed gaiety, that did not in Nathalie's opinion, become her quite so well as the airs *de grande dame* she so often took; "you see that Mademoiselle Montolieu has come back to us safe and not looking scared."

"Oh! no; not yet," shortly answered the Canoness.

"Which implies that she will be so one day. What is Mademoiselle Montolieu's own opinion?"

She bent an inquiring glance on the young girl as she spoke; but Nathalie was not inexpert in the little feminine manœuvre of eluding a question: she replied, with a smile: "Mademoiselle Dantin never could scare me, madame, from which I conclude I am invulnerable."

No more was said on the subject.

When dinner-time came, it was Nathalie who helped the Canoness down stairs: for though she never confessed it, Aunt Radegonde was somewhat infirm.

Monsieur de Sainville was already in the dining-

room ; he had not seen his aunt that day, and as she entered leaning on Nathalie's arm, he came up to her and kissed the little hand still white and delicate, which she extended towards him ; she received this courtesy with cool dignity, merely observing :

" You had bad weather for your ride home, Armand."

" It was rather wet," he coolly replied.

" Rather wet !" thought Nathalie who could hear the rain still pouring down in torrents.

" And a little windy," he added as a keen blast rushed up the avenue and swept round the old château, dying away with a moaning sound.

" I wonder what he considers really wet and windy weather," inwardly pursued Nathalie, who had all the asperity of a chilly southern against the dreary north.

" But it was not too wet for poor André to go," dryly observed Aunt Radegonde, as her nephew led her o the table.

" Oh ! he is gone then !" said he quietly.

" Yes, and I think it a great pity," she observed, drawing herself up very decisively.

Monsieur de Sainville made no reply.

" A great pity for his family," said the Canoness, with slight hesitation. " Did you speak, Armand ?" she added after a pause.

" No aunt, but I agree with you : it is a pity."

" He is hard," thought Nathalie, half indignantly.

The meal was formal and silent. Monsieur de de Sainville spoke little ; Madame Marceau seemed

enveloped in her own dignity; the Canoness was mute. But when dessert was brought up and the servants had retired, she turned towards her nephew, near whom she sat, suddenly observing:

"Armand, why did you dismiss that poor André?"

"For neglect of my orders, aunt."

"Because, you see," she continued in a half apologetic tone, as if willing to explain her abrupt inquiry, "I know the man to be so sober, honest, and industrious; at least I think so," she added, gradually shrinking, like many an advocate, from the cause of her protégé.

"You are quite right, aunt," quietly said Monsieur de Sainville, "André is all that."

"Then, why dismiss him?" asked the Canoness once more, quite confident.

"For neglect of my orders, aunt," he answered, exactly in the same tone as before.

"I understand," sagaciously said Aunt Radegonde, "it was something very important."

"Only a tree he neglected to fell," carelessly replied her nephew.

"You dismiss him for that!"

"Not for the order neglected, aunt, but for having neglected the order."

"Why not tell him again?"

"Because I never keep servants to whom I must repeat the same order twice. I waited three days to see whether he would or not, do as I had told him, and waited uselessly. I paid him about double what I

owed him to get rid of him at once. He will easily find another situation: I have done him no wrong."

"Ay," said Radegonde in a low tone, "that is how people have servants who never love them, Armand."

Monsieur de Sainville, was reclining back in his chair with folded arms. He looked down at his aunt and smiled a little ironically.

"Aunt," said he, "we pay servants to serve, and not to love us; and they serve us not for love, but for wages. There is no obligation on either side; it is a contract, a bargain—no more. As for explanations between master and servant, they will not do: the servant would only learn to argue, a right he has given up, instead of obeying; the master in speaking to the hireling, would forget the man; in short, we should have the contemptible and odious characters of rebel and tyrant face to face; one of which characters seldom exists indeed, unless in presence of the other."

"Come," thought Nathalie, "a few more such conversations, and I think I shall begin to understand you."

But as she looked up, she met the keen look of Monsieur de Sainville, opposite whom she sat. She remembered what he had told her, concerning the frankness of her face, and with some trepidation, she resolved to be more on her guard for the future.

Madame Marceau now opened her lips in sententious speech.

"Authority, my dear aunt," said she, addressing

the Canoness, "cannot be thus cast away. The power to rule is the test of mind. But few, very few," she emphatically added, "possess that lofty power."

No one replied; dinner was over. Monsieur de Sainville retired to the library; the ladies went up to the drawing-room.

Seated on her low seat, for the place by Aunt Radegonde now seemed hers, with her work lying neglected on her lap, her look fastened on the burning embers, Nathalie was lulled into a reverie, by the mingled sound of wind and rain. She was soon roused by the Canoness, who asked whether she played or sang, and eagerly requested her to sing something, when with a smile she replied that she could do both. Madame Marceau declared she would be charmed to hear her; she spoke as if Nathalie could neither touch the instrument, nor open her lips, without her majestic encouragement.

Nathalie rose, and silently seated herself before the piano; her fingers wandered awhile over the keys, as she played the prelude to a gay romance: but something in the murmurs of this chill evening awoke the memory of old times; the strain changed suddenly, and she sang an old sailor's hymn to the Virgin, which she had often heard, and sung in her native province. The human voice is the most spiritual expression of music, that poetry of sense, and never does it rise so much above what is earthly, as when giving utterance to religious melody: the voice of Nathalie, was not of the highest quality or ex-

tent, but it was clear, flexible, and expressive; especially on this evening, when the memory of early youth, and home, was with her as she sang. Aunt Radegonde was all attention, with her head thoughtfully inclined on one side, and her knitting at rest.

"Well," said she, when the strain had ceased, "I should not have thought you sang religious music."

"What sort of music did you think then I sang?" promptly asked Nathalie.

"Something like yourself,—pretty and gay."

"And frivolous," added Nathalie in a nettled tone. She looked up as she spoke from the instrument, and in the large mirror behind it, she perceived the figure of Monsieur de Sainville, whose entrance she had not heard. He was standing near his aunt, and appeared to have been listening.

"Pray sing us something else," said the Canoness.

"We shall be happy to hear Mademoiselle Montolieu again," observed Madame Marceau, with stately grace.

Nathalie hesitated. She wondered whether Monsieur de Sainville was a judge of music, and whether he would join his entreaties to those of his aunt and sister; but he remained silent, and to all appearance uninterested. After some more hesitation, the young girl complied with Aunt Radegonde's request; she sang an Italian piece, and though her voice was at first slightly tremulous, she felt that she sang it well.

"My dear child," emphatically said the Canoness, "you are a little prodigy."

"Mademoiselle Montolieu sings charmingly," observed Madame Marceau.

Her brother said nothing, and as Nathalie left the instrument to resume her seat, he began to walk slowly up and down the room; an exercise that appeared to be customary to him.

To all appearance the young girl was absorbed by her work, but in truth her thoughts were very differently engaged. She felt extremely nettled, in spite of herself, at her host's indifference.

"How morose he must be, not to like music," she thought, without acknowledging to herself, that it was his want of admiration for her music, that vexed her; "and Italian music too! But how indeed could it touch a northern icicle like him?"

Monsieur de Sainville stopped short as she came to this indignant conclusion, with a sort of coincidence to her thought that somewhat startled her; he said briefly:

"Do you not come from the south, Mademoiselle Montolieu?"

Nathalie assented.

"I thought so. I was once on the Mediterranean in a storm, and all the sailors sang that hymn you sang just now. I had never heard it since then."

He walked up to the end of the room, and as he came back once more, he again addressed her:

"May I inquire from what part of the south you come?"

"From Arles, in Provence."

"Arles!" said the Canoness, catching the word; "Arles," she repeated. "Chère Petite, what is Arles so very celebrated for?"

Nathalie knew, but did not care to say.

"Antiquities, I believe," observed Madame Marceau.

"No, it is not antiquities," decisively said the Canoness; "Petite, you smile, I am sure you know."

"We have so many good things at Arles," replied Nathalie, colouring as she caught Monsieur de Sainville's look eyeing her keenly; "excellent ham, for instance."

"Petite, I am sure it is not ham."

"Arles is celebrated for the beauty of its women," quietly observed Monsieur de Sainville; "they are held to be beyond doubt the handsomest women of France."

He had paused for a moment, and resumed his walk as he concluded.

"There," cried the Canoness, with great triumph, "I knew Arles was celebrated for something remarkable. Armand, do tell us what these handsome women are like."

She looked shrewdly at Nathalie, who, conscious perhaps that she was no unfair specimen of Arlesian beauty, blushed deeply and bent over her work. But there was no need to blush.

"Beauty must be seen and felt,—not described," coldly said Monsieur de Sainville.

Aunt Radegonde looked disappointed; Nathalie

felt slighted, and thought her host a very disagreeable man; Madame Marceau, sitting in lonely majesty on a couch facing her, allowed her lip to curl with a haughty smile. Of all this, Monsieur de Sainville seemed to heed nothing. In passing by the table he had perceived and immediately taken up a card lying upon it. He read the name, and looked at his sister very fixedly. Nathalie had seen that card in the course of the day, and been struck to perceive that the name engraved upon it was that of Madame Marceau de Sainville, as if the owner repudiated, as much as in her power lay, the plebeian alliance, and, despite of custom, claimed back the patrician name of her birth. She now watched her brother with breathless, though stealthy, attention, as he stood with the card in his hand. He laid it down silently; she looked triumphant.

"Rosalie," he abruptly asked, "was not your husband related to the celebrated republican General Marceau?"

"There was a very distant relationship," replied she, much disturbed.

"I congratulate you," he briefly said; "our military annals hold not a name more stainless or more noble; for he, the champion of modern freedom, the man of to-day, had yet inherited the soul of the past, the spirit of truth and old chivalric honour. Years ago, passing by Coblentz, I saw the pyramid beneath which he then lay, not far from the spot where he fell in his glorious youth. Why have they removed

him? Those are trophies we should ever leave to the soil of the foe."*

As he spoke thus, a flush crossed his pale brow, and for a moment his calm look kindled.

There was an awkward attempt on the part of Madame Marceau to look interested and sympathetic, but in spite of all her efforts her brow was overcast, and Nathalie could see her biting her lip, like one striving in vain against some bitter disappointment. Her brother retired early, and she left soon after him.

As Nathalie was dressing herself on the following morning, she chanced to open the upper drawer of the ebony cabinet; scarcely had she done so when

* Byron, who loved true heroism, has bestowed a noble eulogy on the memory of the heroic Marceau.

By Coblentz, on a rise of gentle ground,
There is a small and simple pyramid,
Crowning the summit of the verdant mound;
Beneath its base are heroes' ashes hid,
Our enemy's—but let that not forbid
Honour to Marceau! o'er whose early tomb
Tears, big tears, gush'd from the rough soldier's lid,
Lamenting and yet envying such a doom,
Falling for France, whose rights he battled to resume.

Brief, brave, and glorious was his young career,
His mourners were two hosts, his friends and foes;
And fitly may the stranger, lingering here,
Pray for his gallant spirit's bright repose;
For he was freedom's champion, one of those,
The few in number, who had not o'erstept
The charter to chastise, which she bestows
On such as wield her weapons; he had kept
The whiteness of his soul, and thus men o'er him wept.

Childe Harold, st. 46, 47, Canto III.

her eye fell on a letter lying within it. Her first impulse was to draw back, her next to return to the drawer, take up the letter, read the superscription, examine the seal, and, after keeping it some time in her hand, to replace it exactly where she had found it. She then closed the drawer, and without thinking of her unbraided hair, which fell down loosely on her shoulders, she stood motionless, with her eyes on the floor, her chin resting on the palm of her hand,—her whole attitude expressive of deep thought.

This meditative mood was interrupted by the entrance of Amanda, who made her appearance with an apologetic curtsey and her usual inquisitorial look. "Madame had sent her to see whether she could not assist mademoiselle in her toilet." Nathalie coldly declined.

But timidity was not one of Amanda's faults. "She felt convinced that she could do something with mademoiselle's fine hair." She officiously brought a chair forward as she spoke; Nathalie looked displeased, but suddenly altering her mind, she seated herself. Amanda's white hands were immediately busy with her dark tresses.

"How delightful!" she enthusiastically exclaimed; "it is so long since I had such an opportunity of exercising my talents. Madame Marceau is the best of mistresses, but she will let me do nothing with her head; whereas Madame la Comtesse d'Onesson made me dress and undress her hair five or six times a-day. It was such good practice, and gave me such lightness

of touch. Does mademoiselle keep her pomatum in the upper drawer of that cabinet?"

"There is nothing in that upper drawer for which I have the least value," dryly replied Nathalie.

"Well, as I was saying," composedly resumed Amanda, "a woman without hair is like a man without a moustache,—nothing. Twice did that fatal point, the want of a moustache in the opposite party, prevent me from marrying very advantageously. Now, though Monsieur Charles is so handsome,—and having lived in the *fleur des pois* of the French noblesse, I ought to know something about handsome men,—he had not my approbation until he allowed his moustache to grow; but, as I was saying, madame's son is as good as he is handsome, and yet he has a fault;—yes, the greatest fault man can have."

She paused. Nathalie said nothing.

"No man can have a greater fault," decisively continued Amanda.

Still Nathalie remained silent.

"Well, as I was saying," resumed Amanda, who had always been saying something she wished to say; "it is incomprehensible; at his age,—at any age. I do not understand women-haters. Some would say he refuses to marry a charming lady, young, rich, and handsome, on account of some previous attachment, but those who have a little experience of the world know that previous attachments are not so strong as all that; there must be woman-hating in the case. Now, though other people may have been disap-

pointed in love, and may feel bitter, and so forth, and never even look civilly at a woman, which they might do if they are too grand to talk,—though as to talking, people quite as grand have done it; now, as I say, that is no reason why young men, who cannot be supposed to have gone through the same disappointments, should take up those shocking principles, and act up to them, and make their mothers unhappy, and cause charming young ladies to be well-nigh broken-hearted,—all because they are women-haters! If there was, indeed, a previous attachment in the case,——will mademoiselle look at herself now?" added Amanda, breaking off suddenly.

Nathalie rose, looked at herself in the glass, and frankly acknowledged Amanda's skill.

"You are a real artist," she said; "the back hair is brought forward in a most original manner."

"It is,—it is," enthusiastically cried Amanda, with a kindling glance; "Mademoiselle has the eye of a master. That *tour* is my own creation. 'Amanda,' said Madame la Comtesse d'Onesson to me, rising, one afternoon, 'I go, in three days, to the Russian Ambassador's ball; all Europe will be there. I must have something novel. Remember that I have spared your feelings; I have not appealed, even on urgent occasions, to the most illustrious professors; but, entre nous, my child, your style is monotonous; I fear you are worn out. Unless you produce some brilliant composition, I shall be compelled to consign you to the ordinary duties of the toilet, and submit to

the vulgar prejudice which gives up the head of woman to the clumsy hands of man.' Let mademoiselle imagine my feelings! I spent two days in the library, looking over books and engravings; but I could neither invent nor borrow. I went to bed in despair;—my reputation was lost. At length an inspiration came; I saw this admirable tour, rose and went to madame's room. Though greatly fatigued from having danced all night, she rose with angelic sweetness. The effect was so admirable, that madame embraced me, and presented me with this ring on the spot. Ah! if mademoiselle would only be kind enough to accept of my services occasionally?"

"Provided you do not meddle with my upper drawer," quietly replied Nathalie.

Amanda smiled demurely. When Nathalie looked in the evening the letter had vanished. It was then on its way to Paris, inclosed in an ill-spelt but well worded billet, addressed by Mademoiselle Amanda to Monsieur Charles, and in which that lady assured him Mademoiselle Montolieu's indifference was only too apparent. A little P.S. likewise informed Monsieur Charles that Mademoiselle Amanda, actuated by the most disinterested zeal in his cause, had undertaken to dress Mademoiselle Montolieu's hair, for the express purpose of disposing her heart more in favour of Monsieur Charles.

The morning passed quietly. Nathalie sate in the drawing-room with the Canoness and Madame Marceau; the former was voluble as usual; her niece

looked unwell, and complained of a sharp pain in her side. Towards noon the sound of carriage-wheels was heard in the avenue. Nathalie detected the hasty look of annoyance Madame Marceau directed towards her.

"Who is it?" asked Aunt Radegonde.

"The De Jussacs, I suppose. Mademoiselle Montolieu, I hope you are not going to leave the room."

This was uttered in as faint a tone of entreaty as politeness permitted.

"Oh! no," coolly answered Nathalie, "but I feel too warm here."

She looked flushed as she rose and retired to one of the window-recesses. The visitors entered; the young girl's look was not once raised from her embroidery, but she felt, if she did not see, that Madame Marceau had placed herself so as to keep her in the shade. This was scarcely needed, for the long drapery of the crimson curtains shrouded her completely from view. The drawing-room was large; Madame de Jussac and her daughters sate with their hostess at the other end of the apartment; their conversation reached Nathalie in broken sentences; she cared not for it; she had laid by her work, her glance was bent on the avenue below, but she saw it not, for her pride, always watchful, was now roused and indignant. She looked round; no one heeded her; she left the apartment unperceived. The garden looked so warm and sunny from the landing window, that

instead of going up to her own room, as she first thought to do, she went down stairs.

The symmetrical gardens loved in the olden time, though now so long out of fashion, have still a rare charm of their own. The airy marble balustrade and graceful stone vases filled with fresh flowers, the broad flight of stately steps, the smooth gravel walks, trim hedges, green grass-plots and variegated parterres, statues of fawns and laughing nymphs, and gay fountains sparkling in the sun, have all the cheerfulness and genial warmth of the pleasant south. Here there is verdure without damp, and spreading shade without treacherous mists or winding alleys of melancholy gloom. The whole aspect of the place is light, joyous and sunny; it speaks of azure skies, of shelter from the fervid sun of noon, and pleasant walks on the clear moonlight; of those days when lovely Italy from the greatest had become the most pleasant land in all Christendom; when gallant cavaliers and fair dames met for revel and pastime in every gay villa, and wiled the hours away with dance and song, or, resting 'neath the shade within the sound and freshness of falling waters, heard and told many a tale of love and old romance.

The pleasant aspect of the garden of Sainville on this autumn morning, the verdure of all around, the blue serenity of the sky, the sunny warmth of the hour charmed Nathalie, whose mind had all the elasticity of her years. She had never seen a spot like this in Provence, and yet by a train of subtle asso-

ciations it did remind her of Provence and of old familiar things. This was enough to soothe her ruffled mood; she lightly walked along the sunny path, —now loitering near a poor statue in its sequestered niche, where it had grown green with the gathered damp of many winters,—now looking at the fountain with its sparkling *jet d'eau*,—now pausing to admire a group of pale and bending china asters, or to watch a proud peacock perched on the top of a marble column rising in the centre of a grass-plot, and on which it stood like some enchanted bird of rare plumage until by approaching, the young girl broke the spell, and opening its wings it flew away with a discordant scream.

It was some time before Nathalie reached the end of the first terrace. She was descending one of the flights of steps that led to the second, when she heard the sound of a footstep in the gravel walk behind her. Without reflecting why she did so, she hastily stepped into the sanctuary of the sleeping nymph. The sound drew nearer; an erect figure descended the flight of steps; it was Monsieur de Sainville. A row of yews and evergreens screened Nathalie from observation; her dark dress could scarcely be discerned through the gloomy foliage of the trees near which she stood, but she could see whilst thus unseen, and she bent eagerly forward as Monsieur de Sainville passed close to her retreat. He looked exactly as on their first interview: calm, grave, and thoughtful. In stooping to see him better she made a slight noise; he paused and threw a quick, penetrating look

towards the spot where she stood: but the glance lasted only a second; his look was once more bent on the earth as with folded arms and thoughtful mien he passed on.

Nathalie breathed more freely. She had felt confident of being discovered, and had no wish for a lonely meeting with her severe-looking host. When after some time she left her retreat, she therefore entered the grounds instead of proceeding to the river side; but she was not fortunate, for the first path she took brought her in presence of Monsieur de Sainville, who was slowly walking along in the same direction. She looked shy and embarrassed; he greeted her with his calm and self-possessed courtesy.

"Do you like the recess where you were a while ago?" he suddenly asked after some desultory conversation.

"Yes, very much," hesitatingly answered Nathalie. "So he knew I was there," she thought, wondering whether he also knew she had been examining him so closely.

"Few like it," he continued; "indeed, it does not agree with the cheerful character of all around. The ivy and yews give the place a dark and melancholy aspect."

Nathalie did not answer, and Monsieur de Sainville spoke no more. They walked along in silence and soon reached a fine lime-tree avenue, which extended from one of the wings of the château into the grounds. As they entered it Nathalie felt relieved to perceive

Madame Marceau and the Canoness seated on a wooden bench which stood within the cool shadow of the largest tree. The younger lady eyed Nathalie with a sort of haughty surprise.

"My dear Armand," said she, addressing her brother with stately concern, "you have missed seeing Madame de Jussac and her daughters; did you not see the carriage?"

"I heard it," was the laconic reply.

"I assure you they were quite disappointed."

Monsieur de Sainville looked supremely indifferent.

"They are such charming girls," continued Madame Marceau; "perfect specimens of Norman beauty —Adèle especially."

She looked at Nathalie, but addressed her brother.

"Yes, she is good looking," he answered.

"Good looking!" repeated Madame Marceau, looking vexed; "I think she is by far the prettiest girl I have ever seen."

Monsieur de Sainville smiled one of his peculiar smiles.

"I have no wish," he coldly said, "to depreciate Mademoiselle de Jussac's attractions, of which, indeed, I am no fair judge, not happening to admire blue eyes or golden hair."

"But you admired them once, Armand," replied his sister, with a short irritated laugh.

Monsieur de Sainville eyed her for a moment with a sort of calm sternness that assorted well with the

unmoved yet severe expression habitual to his countenance. Though the look lasted for a second only, Madame Marceau had not yet recovered from the evident trepidation into which it threw her, when her brother resumed, in his usual tone:

"Beauty is of little worth; Mademoiselle de Jussac possesses woman's greatest charm in a gentle, submissive disposition."

"And *that* is woman's greatest charm, is it?" thought Nathalie, a little nettled.

"Mademoiselle Montolieu," said Madame Marceau, in a patronising tone, "why did you leave the drawing-room so precipitately? Are you timid?"

"Not at all, madame," drily replied Nathalie; "nor gentle," she longed to add, as she detected a half smile on Monsieur de Sainville's countenance, but the temptation was prudently checked.

"Will you not sit down, Petite?" here observed the Canoness. "Amanda said she saw you going into the garden, and I caused this stool to be brought for you."

She spoke as if she felt the slight the young girl had received, and wished to atone for it. Nathalie silently seated herself by her side. Monsieur de Sainville declined his sister's offer of a seat on the bench.

"I prefer this," said he, walking up and down the avenue.

"I think you prefer anything to remaining quiet,"

impatiently thought Nathalie, whom this monotonous promenade annoyed considerably.

"Petite," continued the Canoness, seeing the conversation languish, "will you read us something from the last number of the Revue?"

Nathalie assented, and took the volume.

"What shall I read?" she asked. "Here is a tale entitled Mystère."

"Let us hear Mystère, by all means," said the Canoness, with great alacrity, "and mind you do not read too loud on my account."

Nathalie hesitated to begin; she was wondering whether it was Monsieur de Sainville's intention to listen.

"We are quite ready," majestically said Madame Marceau, nodding to the young girl, who sate on her low stool, with the book on her lap, one hand keeping it open, whilst the other supported her inclined brow.

Nathalie smiled a little disdainfully at finding her hesitation thus interpreted, but she complied, and began.

The story was mysterious enough in feeling, for in incident nothing could be more clear. It professed to relate the fate and sorrows of a handsome and modest girl, madly in love with a profligate sharper, and clinging to him still, in spite of his unworthiness. The only impropriety in the tale was in the subject, but it annoyed Nathalie to be reading it aloud. When she came to the most impassioned passages, she skipped freely; likewise, whenever Monsieur de

Sainville drew near, she read faster, and slightly lowered her voice, to raise it again when he had gone by. This she did several times. At length he suddenly paused in his walk, to say, in his cold, polite way:

"Pray, mademoiselle, do not raise your voice on my account. I hear distinctly when I am farthest, and when you read in your lowest key."

Nathalie coloured, as she perceived her little feminine manœuvre thus detected. To add to her embarrassment, Aunt Radegonde observed, with evident wonder:

"What a strange author, Petite; I never heard such abrupt transitions."

"Nor I," briefly said her nephew, in a tone that convinced Nathalie he knew very well by whose agency the abrupt transitions had been effected.

At length, and to her great satisfaction, the story concluded with an impassioned letter, of which she did not venture to omit one word, addressed by the tender-hearted heroine to her fascinating sharper.

"A romantic story, is it not, Mademoiselle Montolieu?" carelessly observed Madame Marceau, who had been half-reclining in an attitude of total indifference all the time.

"I think it unnatural, madame," replied Nathalie, closing the book.

"Oh! you do? How so?"

Nathalie hesitated to reply. She felt that the under-current of Madame Marceau's bland manner

was sharp and irritating. She looked unwell. Was it pain rendered her thus, or something relative to Monsieur de Sainville, or perhaps even to herself?

"How so?" again said Madame Marceau, as i determined to make her answer,

"Is it not unnatural, madame," answered Nathalie, "that a woman, represented as pure and good, should care for that worthless man?"

"Oh! that is only romantic," answered Madame Marceau, with a cold smile; "and romantic girls are capable of any folly. Do not colour up so, my dear child; you are not at all romantic, I am sure. What struck me as most improbable," she sententiously added, "was, that two such persons, standing at the extremities of the social scale, should meet. But, though you do not of course think so, novels are so false, Mademoiselle Montolieu. I know you will support me there, Armand," she added, turning towards her brother, who now stood near them; "you are no friend of romance."

Nathalie, who felt greatly offended at the unwarranted insinuations Madame Marceau chose to throw out, prepared herself to be still more offended at Monsieur de Sainville's reply.

"If by romance you mean the illusions of youth," he quietly answered, "it is not because I have outlived their day, that I quarrel with them."

Madame Marceau looked annoyed.

"My dear Armand," she exclaimed, with a short

laugh, "I beg your pardon; I thought you were a professed sceptic."

"The character of sceptic," said he, very coldly, "is not one I respect, or to which I lay claim."

"Oh! then I have been mistaken all along," resumed his sister; "I thought—but no matter;—is there any harm, Armand, in asking you in what you still believe?"

"In two things, without which this world, evil as is, would be much worse,—in God and honour."

He spoke gravely, and looked displeased.

"And in nothing else?" ironically inquired Madame Marceau.

Perhaps he did not hear her—perhaps he thought this catechising had been carried far enough; he did not, at least, reply; and Nathalie could see Aunt Radegonde looking uneasily at her niece.

"Well," resumed Madame Marceau, somewhat bitterly, "I suppose we agree on one point at least, Armand,—novels are unreal."

The slight shade of displeasure had completely passed away from Monsieur de Sainville's brow, when he replied—

"Their reality is not that of the every-day world, Rosalie, and why should it be? Their task is to deceive,—let them only deceive us well. When real novels are by chance written, who reads them? Youth lays them down with all the scorn of its fervent faith, and age, unless when grown cynical, has had enough of truth. Fictions are revelations not of truth, for

they are most unreal, but of that which the soul longs to be true; they are mirrors not of actual human experience, but of human dreams and aspirations, of the eternal, though most unavailing desires of the heart."

"At that rate, that foolish Mystère was too real."

"Real," echoed Monsieur de Sainville, "I think, like Mademoiselle Montolieu, that it was a false, unnatural story. What pure woman could love that vulgar sharper? Either he is a better man, or she is a worse woman than we find here represented; either he, with all his vices, has something originally noble, or she, with all her seeming virtue, is corrupt at heart. There is no surer test of a woman's character than the man she prefers."

"I thought caprice was the great guide."

"Not if there is judgment."

"But if there is not judgment," pertinaciously resumed Madame Marceau.

"Then, of course, the character is imperfect and hopeless."

Nathalie thought that he spoke as if weary of the discussion.

"Yes, but where there is judgment," slowly and emphatically said Madame Marceau, "how calm, passionless, and almost godlike is the character;—with what magnificent indifference does it stand aloof, and survey everything external."

"Is this irony or flattery?" thought Nathalie, looking up, and wondering how Monsieur de Sain-

ville would receive this speech, and the "calm, passionless, godlike," &c. He was standing near the bench on which his sister sat, but his unmoved countenance gave no clue to his feelings.

"Those minds are the minds," pursued Madame Marceau; "with them no undue feeling can exist,—reason reigns supreme."

"What has reason to reign over, if there is no undue feeling to subdue?" coldly asked her brother

"Passionless characters are worthless in good or in evil: their gentleness is inability to feel anger; their virtue inability to do wrong. They know not how to hate, because they know not how to love. If there has been no temptation, there can be no merit; if there has been no struggle, there can be no victory."

Nathalie gave him a quick scrutinizing glance, but it was instantly detected by his look, and there was something in that cold and somewhat haughty gaze which completely baffled her scrutiny. She was more successful with Madame Marceau, who vainly endeavoured to look unconcerned.

"I am afraid you are not well, Rosalie," said her brother, addressing her in a low altered tone, after eyeing her for a few moments, "a walk would do you good."

Madame Marceau hesitated, but at length rose, and accepted her brother's offer.

"Will you not accompany us over the grounds, Mademoiselle Montolieu?" he asked, turning towards Nathalie.

Madame Marceau looked haughty and displeased. Nathalie declined, under the plea of remaining with the Canoness.

"No," decisively said Aunt Radegonde, "you have not seen the grounds yet, and you must see them; but, before you go, you will perhaps arrange my shawl about me. Petite," she hurriedly whispered, as Nathalie rose, and wrapped her up in a vast shawl, "never refuse any little civility Armand may offer you; cold as he looks, he can be the best friend in the world. They are waiting; go."

"Why, what sort of a pasha is this host of mine, that so common-place an act of politeness is construed into a high favour," thought Nathalie, as she slowly followed Monsieur de Sainville and his sister. But his quiet, unassuming manner was by no means that of one who has conferred a favour. Nathalie had leisure to contrast it with that of Madame Marceau, who, as if anxious to impress the young girl with the fact, that she and her brother could agree as well as jar, now expatiated, in her lofty way, on divers subjects, all skilfully chosen, as Nathalie thought, so as to draw forth no contradiction. But this was not destined to be a fortunate day with Madame Marceau.

It was not long before they reached a part of the grounds where several men were engaged in clearing away a group of trees, which had been found to injure, instead of improving the prospect. Several trees lay felled on the grass; a few dark yews and a sickly-looking poplar alone remained standing.

"The yews are to remain," said Monsieur de Sainville, addressing the chief of the workmen, who had approached to receive his orders; "but that poplar looks unsightly; I ordered André to fell it several days ago."

"Yes, sir, but Monsieur Charles said it was to stay."

"What!" incredulously exclaimed Monsieur de Sainville.

"Monsieur Charles told him it was to stay, sir," repeated the man, raising his voice.

There was a brief silence. Nathalie could see a slight frown contract Monsieur de Sainville's brow, and Madame Marceau turning pale as she beheld it.

"You will fell the poplar-tree, to-morrow," quietly resumed her brother, and he walked on.

The silence that followed seemed uncomfortable to all. Nathalie lingered behind. Madame Marceau gave her a hasty look, and, probably thinking she was out of hearing, addressed her brother in a low tone:

"I hope, Armand, the imprudence of Charles——"

"We will not mention it," he interrupted; "let him not act so again."

"I am sure André must have misunderstood him."

"I agree with you, that André misunderstood him; and as he committed a mistake, not a fault, he shall be welcome to return, if he chooses."

"I am sure he will be quite grateful," said Madame Marceau, biting her nether lip.

"Why so! for having been unjustly treated, and abruptly dismissed. The fact is, André never suspected he was disobeying me; he concluded no one would give such an order unauthorized by me—I concluded no one would presume to do so."

Madame Marceau made no answer, and the silence was not broken, until Monsieur de Sainville turned towards Nathalie, and observed:

"May I ask your opinion on a matter that occupies me just now?"

Nathalie came up with a half-startled look.

"It is only a gardening question," said he, smiling.

"I am lamentably ignorant of gardening, sir," she hurriedly answered; "I shall utter some solecism."

"And the courage of being mistaken with a good grace is not the courage of your age; but experience will teach you some day to utter a genuine, honest blunder, with suitable unconcern. In the meanwhile, pray let me have your opinion. Shall this grassy plot remain as it is, or shall we enliven it with a few flowers?"

"I should pronounce in favour of the flowers, sir."

"Why so?"

"They are so beautiful."

"But of a frivolous, transient beauty. Yet your suggestion shall be adopted. Taste must have its feminine element, and I have been giving these grounds too dark and severe an aspect. What is the matter, Rosalie?" said he, addressing his sister, who, after listening to him with evident irritation, and

frequently applying the vinaigrette, was now turning away with indignant majesty.

"I feel unwell, Armand," said she, coldly.

"Then let us go in, and take aunt *en passant*."

Madame Marceau retired to her room for the rest of the day. When her brother came down to the drawing-room in the evening, Nathalie felt much piqued at the mixture of politeness and indifference with which he treated her presence. "Did he mean to awe her? He might find himself mistaken!" But, alas! it was only too apparent that to awe her or produce any effect upon her was the last of Monsieur de Sainville's thoughts. Half out of curiosity, half out of pique, she ventured to differ from him once or twice, just to see how he would take it. He took it very well indeed—smiled—seemed a little surprised, and a little amused—heard her politely, but without giving her arguments great weight — and treated her, in short, with the good-humoured forbearance which a man of his years and experience might be expected to display towards a young and somewhat presumptuous girl. In vain she looked cold, dignified, and displeased. Monsieur de Sainville would not notice her vexation or acknowledge her claims, but persisted in treating her with the most provoking and gentlemanlike courtesy.

"Petite," said the Canoness, when he was gone, "how hot you look! Is the room close?"

Nathalie gave her a searching glance, but there was no mistaking the innocent simplicity of her

look. More than she said, she evidently did not mean.

"Yes," answered Nathalie, "the room is very close."

The lamp was still unlit when she went up to her room, but a ray of light from the opposite turret fell on the polished oak floor. The young girl looked out —the light came from Monsieur de Sainville's window, and she could see him pacing his room up and down in a regular and monotonous promenade.

"He seems restless enough, for one so quiet-looking," thought Nathalie, as she stood by her window, watching him before she allowed the curtain which she held back with her hand to drop once more; "but impenetrable and mysterious as he chooses to appear, it shall go hard if I do not learn to read and understand him yet."

CHAPTER VIII.

"Mademoiselle Montolieu, how demure you look to-day," said a soft, bland voice behind Nathalie, as she stood on the following morning working in the embrasure of the drawing-room window. A fair hand, sparkling with jewels, was lightly laid on her shoulder. Nathalie turned round, and beheld Madame Marceau. Her cheek had a hectic tinge, deepened by the reflection from the crimson curtain near which she stood; her eyes were feverish and restless, her lips parched and dry; but she smiled down very graciously on the young girl, whose passive hand she took within her own. "You are not privileged to be grave, like me," she continued; "you see, my child, I have not always met those in whose honour and strong sense I could trust. I must sometimes misunderstand motives and actions; but I have been speaking to Armand this morning: he has made clear that which seemed obscure—there is no misunderstanding now." She spoke significantly, and pressed her hand.

Nathalie did not answer. The lady eyed her keenly.

"Mademoiselle Montolieu," said she, drawing herself up with melancholy dignity, "certain positions are dearly bought. Others can be unwell—can heed their sufferings; we belong not to ourselves; we must act a part; but we are human—the reaction inevitably follows."

"And I fear you were very ill yesterday," said Nathalie.

"Ill!" sharply echoed the lady; "no, I was only nervous; my health is excellent. Aunt," she added, turning towards the Canoness, "have you been telling Mademoiselle Montolieu that I am ill?"

"I, Rosalie! no: but Armand said yesterday evening he would send Doctor Laurent to you."

"He is too kind—I am quite well," said her niece, whilst a forced smile parted her pale lips.

Aunt Radegonde, laying down her knitting, began a grave lecture on the danger of neglect; but Madame Marceau angrily exclaimed,

"I tell you I am not ill, aunt."

The Canoness coughed dubiously, but held her peace.

A week passed away. Monsieur de Sainville was away at Marmont; his sister dropped her patronizing tone, and treated her young guest with much politeness and consideration. Nathalie was beginning, however, to feel a touch of *ennui* at the stately routine of her new existence, when one morning she unex-

pectedly learned that her sister had returned. She resolved to call upon her immediately; but she had promised to join the Canoness in the drawing-room, and, in passing by, she entered it to excuse herself.

Neither Aunt Radegonde nor Madame Marceau occupied their usual seats; but the room was not lonely, for, standing with his back towards her, Nathalie perceived Monsieur de Sainville. She had not so much as suspected his return from Marmont. Her first impulse was to retire; but he looked up, saw her in one of the large mirrors, and turned round composedly. Though he could scarcely repress a smile as he detected her look of annoyance, he greeted her with his accustomed politeness. Nathalie looked cold and reserved, and remained standing near the door.

"I am fortunate in meeting you thus," said he, quietly, "for I very much wished to speak to you."

Nathalie came forward half-hesitatingly. He wanted her to be seated, but she declined, "she preferred standing." She did not look shy, but proud, and, though she knew it not, half-offended. Her whole bearing said, "I do not intend this interview to last very long."

"I believe you are going out," said Monsieur de Sainville, "and I do not wish to detain you. I have only one question to ask: may I hope you will do me the favour of answering it? You have been about a week in Sainville: do you like your sojourn here?"

Nathalie had not anticipated this question. She

hesitated, sought for a proper reply, and found none so suitable as the plain one, "very much, sir."

He looked pleased.

"I am gratified to hear you say so, in that frank way, for to say the truth, I feared that at your age, and with the tastes natural to youth, this house must prove very dull. Do you think," he added, after a pause, "you would like to dwell here for some length of time?"

Nathalie looked embarrassed.

"I believe I should," she at length replied; "but—"

"I am not asking you to bind yourself to anything," interrupted Monsieur de Sainville; "indeed, the latter question was perhaps premature; but I am happy to learn Sainville is not disagreeable to you."

With this the conversation ended. Nathalie left the room wondering what Monsieur de Sainville meant, and so much occupied with this thought that she wholly forgot her intended apology to the Canoness, and even passed by Mademoiselle Dantin's door without remembering that she had once lived there.

The town of Sainville was irregularly built on a declivity; its steep, narrow, and ill-paved streets overhung with high, projecting houses, most of them built of wood, rendered it one of the most picturesque and gloomy little places in all Normandy. It had been an abbey town before the first French revolution, and a sort of perpetual twilight and monastic silence shrouded it still. A few dull shops scarcely relieved the monotony of the well-like streets, with their gaunt

old houses rising in dark outlines against the bright blue sky. When Nathalie had first come from her gay sunny Provence to this gloomy town of the north, she had candidly wondered at the human beings who, without any seeming necessity, could resign themselves to inhabit this misanthropic-looking spot. Even now, accustomed to it as she had grown, she found, after leaving the light and airy old château, that the very houses along which she passed had an air of greater dreariness and *ennui* than ever.

Madame Lavigne, the aunt of Rose, resided at the other extremity of the town, in a retired little court, or rather alley, lying within the deep shadow and sanctified gloom of the old abbey. Grey, vast, and imposing, it rose facing a row of narrow houses, on the other side of the pathway, which had been used as a passage to a side-door of the edifice, in former times, when the abbey was in its pride, and devout pilgrims thronged Sainville at the yearly and gorgeous festivals of its patron saint. But a neighbouring railroad had reduced the little town to complete insignificance; the faithful had fallen off in zeal and numbers; the side entrance had long been closed up, dust gathered through years, and carved stone ornaments fallen from a neighbouring and half-ruined tower, lay heaped up against the wooden door; the long grass grew freely on the worn out, but now untrodden threshold, and between the damp flags of the lonely court. Rooks had made their nests in the ruined tower, where they cawed all day long, whilst grey

swallows skimmed about at twilight, and twittered beneath the eaves of the low-walled and abandoned cloisters. A wild pear-tree, growing in the neglected grounds within, overhung the low roof and narrow court in which it shed its pale blossoms every spring, and russet leaves every autumn; beneath it, in a sheltering angle of the building, stood a small stone cross and well; the gift to the town of some pious burgher, of that age of faith when an idea of sanctity seems to have been linked with clear and flowing waters. The well-worn steps attested it had once been greatly frequented, but none, save the inhabitants of the court, came to it now; another fountain, twice as large, profusely gilt and bronzed, with a gay nymph instead of the lowly and faithful cross, stood in the neighbouring thoroughfare. Little heeding the changes of human caprice or creed, clear and sparkling as ever, the pure water flowed on, and fell into its little stone basin with a low cheerful murmur, like a bountiful soul that gives freely still, in spite of all the neglect and ingratitude of man.

It was opposite this fountain that the house of Madame Lavigne stood. Nathalie gave a low knock at the door; it opened ere long, and an elderly, morose-looking female appeared on the threshold. Without uttering a word, or opening the door an inch wider than strict necessity required, she admitted Nathalie, closed and bolted the door, pointed up a dark spiral staircase, and entering a low kitchen, in which there seemed to reign a sort of dull twilight, she

resumed her culinary avocations. Nathalie ascended the staircase, paused on the first-floor landing, and, opening a door before her, entered without knocking.

The apartment in which she found herself was wide and extremely low; it was one of those unhealthy *entresols* now met with only in old-fashioned houses; it was scrupulously clean, but everything, from the antiquated furniture of dark walnut-tree wood, the dingy looking-glass over the mantel-shelf, and the low ceiling, down to the cold bees-waxed floor, had an air of gloom and discomfort. A doubtful and yellow light seemed to penetrate slowly through the narrow and discoloured panes of a solitary window, but it won no reflection back from the dark surface of surrounding objects; heavy curtains of sombre hue, which fell from the ceiling to the floor in long folds, added to the austere and meditative gloom of the place. Partly shrouded by the dark folds of one of those curtains, and seated within the narrow circle of light which came from the window, appeared a quiet female figure: pale, thin, and motionless, she bent over her work in subdued harmony with all around her. She did not raise her head, or turn round on hearing Nathalie, but laid down her work, carefully put it by, and rose so slowly that she had not yet left her place, when the young girl stood by her side. This was Rose Montolieu, the sister of Nathalie.

It would have been difficult to find two beings more different than the two sisters as they now stood

together in the dull light of the narrow window, and exchanged a quiet greeting. Dark-haired, dark-eyed, with a figure rounded, though graceful and slender, with the soft bloom of health upon her cheeks, and the clear light of youth in her eyes, Nathalie looked as gay and sunny a vision as any to which her own native Provence ever gave birth. Not all the chill and gloom of the cold room could mar that fresh and poetic beauty: the warmth and brightness of the southern sun were around her still.

But the mournful austerity of the northern home in which her lonely youth had been spent, had fallen early on Rose Montolieu. She had worked and sewed as a child in the dull light of that window, and in that dreary-looking room; the court below, the bubbling fountain, the ancient abbey, and the half-ruined tower had daily met her view for years, and for years the farthest wall of the cloister and an old church-yard which it inclosed, but where none were buried now, had bounded her narrow horizon. Unless on Sundays and holy days, when she heard mass and vespers in the abbey church, Rose seldom or ever went out. Traces of this sedentary life were impressed on her whole appearance. She was not ugly, nor was she handsome, for either would have been striking, and she looked pale and colourless like a flower reared in the shade. She was tall, rather thin, and she stooped habitually; her figure would have been good but for its total want of grace; her features were regular, but sallow and deficient in

character or marked expression. The brow indeed told of intelligence, and the mouth, closed and quiet, of reserve; but the general outlines were pale and dim. Flaxen-coloured hair and light blue eyes added to the sickliness of her appearance. This effect was increased by the best point in her face, teeth of dazzling whiteness and purity, but which only added to the wanness of her whole aspect, when her pale lips parted in a faint smile of rare occurrence. She looked upwards of thirty, though she was in reality a few years younger. Never was the name of Rose bestowed on one whose pallid look was more likely to suggest a painful contrast to the bloom aud beauty it implies.

She took Nathalie's extended hand, stooped to imprint a kiss on her forehead, then sat down again and resumed her work. Nathalie took off her bonnet and scarf, seated herself by her sister's side, and was the first to speak.

"Well, Rose, how are you?" she asked, in her gay, cheerful tones.

"Very well," slowly answered Rose, and the grave, melancholy cadence of her low voice contrasted as strikingly with that of her sister as did her personal appearance. She worked in silence for a few minutes, then looked up and said, "I saw Mademoiselle Dantin yesterday."

"But you do not judge me from her account?" very quickly returned Nathalie.

"No, I shall judge you from your own."

Rose laid down her work, and looked up as she

spoke thus. This was a trying moment for Nathalie. She respected her sister more than she loved her,—she knew so little of her, and they felt so differently. She complied nevertheless with the desire of Rose, and related to her all that had happened before and since her departure from Madamoiselle Dantin's school.

"I suppose it could not be helped," thoughtfully said her sister when she had concluded. "How do you like your present position?"

"Very much indeed, Rose; it is a pleasant change to live in that fine old château, with its quaint garden and pleasant grounds; to be mistress of my time, and not to be teased by tiresome Mademoiselle Dantin."

Rose glanced at the limited horizon beyond her narrow window, then at the room so dark aud dreary, and finally at her handsome sister.

"Yes," she said, in her low tone, "that place must suit your fancy well; but how do you like your hosts?"

"They are kind, though a little peculiar; the Canoness is simple and charming; she calls me Petite, though I could make two of her. Her niece, the grand lady, was proud and patronizing at first, but has much improved since she understands that I have no ambitious designs on the heir of the Sainville race. There is also a certain impertinent and yet artistic femme-de-chambre—in short, all is wonderfully different from the next-door house."

"And Monsieur de Sainville?"

"I have seen little of him."

"But what do you think of him?"

"I do not think of him at all."

She spoke coldly. Rose eyed her with slow surprise.

"What do you think of his nephew?" she resumed.

"That he is handsome, cool, and confident," replied Nathalie, smiling.

"You think him handsome?"

"Yes, indeed! And you look wonderfully alarmed, Rose."

"Do you love him?" asked Rose, almost quickly.

"Love him!" echoed Nathalie, much offended.

"I mean, do you think you will like him some day?"

"Really I cannot tell."

"You make me feel anxious," said Rose, nervously laying down her work; "you are so heedless, and that young man seems to me so unprincipled. Were his intentions ever honourable?"

"He dared not have had any other; he dared not, Rose," cried Nathalie, almost angrily; her look kindled, and her cheek flushed in a moment.

"You defend him."

"I defend myself, Rose!"

Rose fixed her mild, earnest glance on that gay, handsome face, over which still lingered the flush of wounded pride.

"I will not advise you," she said, "for you do not

follow advice; but I have seen that Charles Marceau. Handsome as he is, I like him not. I like not his eye nor his look. Oh! Nathalie, to the woman he loves, that man, so young in years, so old in aspect, will bring nothing but sorrow, and to the woman who loves him nothing but tenfold woe. Besides, that family is so proud! Oh! sister, do not love him; do not, even were he an angel of light."

"And he is more like an angel of darkness. Come, Rose, do not look grave. I am here, he is in Paris; and as I happen to be as proud as all the Marceaus and the De Sainvilles, I promise you that, even were he an angel of light, this dangerous Charles Marceau shall be nought to me."

Rose looked more easy. There was a pause.

"Do you like Monsieur de Sainville?" she resumed, abstractedly.

"What matter, Rose, whether I do or not? it will not trouble him much."

"Do you like him?"

Nathalie coloured, hesitated. "No," she at length resolutely replied.

"And why not?" gravely asked her sister.

"Because I do not like him."

"But I want to know why."

"Well then because he is disagreeable and proud."

"Do you mean ill-tempered?"

"No, he rules his temper, as he rules everything, —with the iron hand, in the velvet glove."

"Then what do you dislike him for?"

"Dislike is a strong word. I care not for him He may be harsh and proud; it is nought to me."

"Harsh and proud! this argues little with the noble story of his youth."

"And pray," asked Nathalie, smiling somewhat ironically, "what do you see so very noble in the character of one who devotes the best part of existence to the ambitious task of winning back a lost wealth and position, and who, whilst paying his father's debts, does not lose the opportunity of making a very handsome fortune?"

"Have you lost your old admiration for the heroic, or is this mere perversity?" asked Rose, a little indignantly. "Monsieur de Sainville is only too good to think about you."

"Which is not at all, Rose; take my word for it."

"I see," quietly said Rose, "he has hurt your pride, or rather your vanity. Foolish girl! Do you know he took the trouble to call on Mademoiselle Dantin and explain this matter to her. She told me herself, and confessed she had been much too hasty. At the same time she said you were the most fiery and vindictive little thing she had ever met with."

"Which amiable character she no doubt gave to Monsieur de Sainville," observed Nathalie, colouring, and looking vexed. "I am very much obliged to him for calling on my greatest enemy, and fishing out my faults from her."

"Fishing out your faults," said Rose compassionately; "child, what interest can a man of his years

and experience take in the faults, or good points, of a girl of eighteen?"

"Very well," replied Nathalie, evidently nettled, "the girl of eighteen cares little for either his years or experience; that is one comfort."

"Early this morning," continued Rose, "Désirée told me a gentleman wanted me below. I came down; it was Monsieur de Sainville, sitting where you are sitting now."

Nathalie remained mute. Her sister resumed:

"He came to me, as your only relative, to apologize and explain. I told him I feared your sojourn at the château would excite some attention, upon which, though not without much hesitation, he suggested that you should remain as his aunt's companion. Still I objected, but when he asked if your sudden disappearance from the town of Sainville would not give rise to more disagreeable conjectures, I could not but confess it; and you unfortunately know too well that I have no home to offer you. You must stay there a few months at least."

Nathalie looked very thoughtful.

"Rose," she said at length, "I retract; he is kind to me at least. You called me perverse. Oh! if you only knew how I long sometimes to yield reverence and homage. But enough of this: how is your aunt?"

"Irrecoverably blind, and she knows it. She is coming down."

Nathalie did not say how little she desired to meet

Madame Lavigne. She rose, turned towards the window, and leaning her brow against the glass pane, looked out. The brightness of the blue noonday sky beyond, seemed to render the court more dark and dull than usual, yet a streak of sunshine from behind the old abbey, gleamed through the thin foliage of the pear tree, whilst its light shadow waved to and fro over the little fountain. Nathalie thought of the warm old garden of Sainville, and the thought made both court and fountain look more cold and chill than ever. She glanced at her sister. Rose was bending once more over her task, silent and motionless. "And this," thought Nathalie, "is her home, her life; and were she to live another century, I verily believe she would be found in that same place; the patient slave of that old tyrant."

The door opened, and Madame Lavigne entered, supported by Désirée, who, near her mistress, looked gentle and benignant.

It was not age, though she was old, that gave so harsh and repulsive a look to the aunt of Rose. The low brow needed not the furrows of years to be stern and forbidding; and wrinkles could scarcely add to the sour expression of the mouth, with its downward and contemptuous curve: notwithstanding the dulness of the sightless eyes, the expression of the whole face was acute and shrewd; but it was the shrewdness of cunning, not of intellect. On seeing her enter, Rose got up, drew a large arm-chair forward, and helped her to be seated.

"Do not handle me," snappishly exclaimed Madame Lavigne; "you know I cannot endure it."

Rose withdrew in silence.

"You might give me the pillow whilst you were about it," said her aunt, in the same ill-tempered tone; "but that is like you—officious and doing nothing."

Rose took a pillow from a chair, shook it, and placed it behind her aunt, who only waved her impatiently away.

"Enough," she briefly said, "I hate fondling; I know what it means. Désirée," she added in a soft civil tone, as the patient Rose returned to her seat, and resumed her work, "is my chop ready?"

"Not yet," was the reply, more laconic than respectful.

"I shall be glad of it, when it is ready; not that I mean to hurry you, but I shall be glad of it."

"Of course," returned Désirée, with a disdainful toss of the head; but she did not go, or seem in any hurry. She loitered about the place, wiped away a few particles of dust from the furniture with her apron, opened the window, closed it again, and at length condescended to leave the room. Nathalie turned round to resume her seat: in an instant the features of the blind woman were alive with a strange expression of mingled anger and alarm:

"Who is that? You have got some one with you, Rose. Who is that?"

Nathalie laughed gaily.

"Oh! merry little Nathalie, who is always laughing, and always makes one laugh," said Madame Lavigne, with an attempt to smile graciously; "where is she?"

"Here," replied Nathalie, rising, and approaching her.

"Ay, here she is," continued the blind woman, stretching out her hand towards the young girl; "here she is, with that cheerful voice, which does one good to hear. Oh! dear child, if you were my niece, you would amuse me in my old age, without interested motives. But there is one comfort," she added after a pause, "I have only an annuity which dies with me; let those think the contrary who will."

Nathalie glanced at her sister, but if Rose had been as devoid of hearing as her aunt was of sight, she could not have remained more unmoved.

"I suppose," thought Nathalie, "poor Rose is accustomed to it."

"Well," said the blind woman, in a slightly impatient tone, though it was conciliatory still, "how will my merry little Nathalie amuse her poor old friend to-day? Will she sing one of the funny Provençal songs, or take off that cross Mademoiselle Dantin? Oh! I forgot that she is at the château now,—companion, governess, what is it? Then I suppose it is that odd Monsieur de Sainville she will take off; come, let us hear."

She assumed a listening attitude; but Nathalie briefly replied:

"Monsieur de Sainville is not at all odd; and as he happens to be my best friend now, I shall not take him off."

She turned to move away, but the blind woman held her fast.

"So he is your best friend," she said, with a peculiar smile. "Ah! Well, girls of eighteen might choose older men for their best friends."

Nathalie coloured, but did not deign to reply.

"And is that best friend of yours very kind?" continued Madame Lavigne.

"Very kind."

"True: best friends of thirty-five or forty—that is his age, is it not?—are always kind, especially——"

"Madame Lavigne," interrupted Nathalie, "you will please not to talk so. I will not hear it."

The blind woman laughed—a short, sour laugh.

"Little spitfire, that is how you used to go on with poor Mademoiselle Dantin; that is how you will go on with the best friend ere long. Heaven help him, poor man! Oh! you need not tap your foot so impatiently, I know I am teazing you; but, child, you are nothing unless you are teazed: I know, when I could see, you never looked half so pretty as at those times. Ah! I dare say you are smiling now; but you need not, you foolish child; the beauty of southern women never lasts: they are old at twenty-five. Now, if you were like Rose," she added, after a pause, "pale, ugly——"

"Rose is not ugly," angrily interrupted Nathalie;

"she is pale; but if she had only exercise and fresh air, she would be quite blooming. She has what an aunt of hers never had,—nice, gentle features. Of me you may say what you like; but I warn you I will not hear a word against Rose, who has enough to endure from your tyranny."

She spoke hotly, and her eyes sparkled, half with anger, half with tears. The ill-tempered spite of Madame Lavigne against poor Rose, though familiar to her, always inspired her with the same indignant surprise; for to a generous heart, injustice, however old, seems ever new.

The vehement reproaches of the young girl, uttered in a rapid tone, which rendered her southern accent more apparent, only drew a sarcastic smile from the blind woman.

"So, I am a tyrant," she said, as if rather flattered by the imputation. "I am; I know it: from a child I would have my way. Rose can leave me if she likes, and she remains——"

"Because she is too good," roundly interrupted Nathalie.

"Oh! she is, is she? Well, talking of the best friend has put you out of temper. Sing me one of the Basque songs, whilst waiting for that chop, which I think Désirée will never bring."

Pity for Madame Lavigne's infirmity, and the desire of lessening the weary burden Rose had to bear, generally induced Nathalie to endure with good-humoured patience the covert irony concealed under the blind

woman's kindness; but on this day, instead of complying with the request of Madame Lavigne, whose side she had left, she turned her flushed face towards the window, and remained obstinately silent.

"So we are offended," said Madame Lavigne, after waiting awhile; "we do not like allusions to the best friend. Ah! well——"

The entrance of Désirée, bringing in the long-expected chop, checked what she was going to add. Rose took the tray from the servant, placed it on a small table, cut the meat, arranged everything, and, having brought the table near to her aunt's chair, resumed her own seat in silence.

Madame Lavigne ate a few morsels, and frowned.

"It is not done enough," said she, crossly.

This remark having elicited no corresponding observation, she added, in a sharper tone:

"Did you hear, Rose? My chop is not done enough."

"Will you have another, aunt?"

"Another, when meat is at the price it is! Another chop! Is the girl mad?"

"Then what is to be done, aunt?"

"Time to ask, indeed! What is to be done? You might say what should have been done?"

Rose made no reply.

Madame Lavigne ate a few morsels more, then laid down her plate indignantly.

"You have the worst heart in the world," she exclaimed, with a sort of snarl; "here I keep telling

you that my chop is not done enough, which implies that I shall feel miserable for the whole day, and you never so much as say you are sorry for it. Did I adopt and rear you up at my own expense for this, you ungrateful thing? To punish you, I shall not touch a morsel more; I shall not eat another bit to-day. There, take the plate away; and ring the bell."

Rose complied. The sour-faced Désirée made her appearance.

"Well," said she sharply, "what am I rung up for? I warn you," she added, turning towards her mistress, "I am not going to trot up and down at your pleasure. What do you want?"

"There, do not be cross," soothingly said Madame Lavigne; "but you see, Désirée, the chop was very good,—very good indeed, only not quite done."

"Not done enough?" indignantly echoed the servant. "You dare tell me I do not know how to cook a chop—a mutton chop! Then depend upon it that is the last chop I shall cook for you."

"My dear Désirée!"

"And we shall see how matters will go on when I am away. How much more candle will be burned in the week; how much more wood it will take to fill the cellar; with oil for the lamp, and money for everything. Go your ways; another shall cook your chops soon; ay, and help to eat them too."

"Désirée!" exclaimed Madame Lavigne, utterly distressed at this lamentable picture of household ruin,

"you must not go. I cannot afford to let you go. You are the most honest creature breathing; I could trust you with every cupboard in the house."

"Every cupboard!" ironically ejaculated Désirée, "as if there was what would fatten a mouse in any of your cupboards."

"Give me the chop," submissively said Madame Lavigne; "I will eat it."

"Eat it! Do not; it would poison you. Ah! well, my chops will not trouble you long."

Madame Lavigne wrung her hands.

"Rose! Nathalie, my dear child!" she exclaimed, "do somebody give me that chop; I want it; I have not had my dinner. There," she added, with a sigh, as Rose complied, and she ate hastily what was on the plate; "there, I am sure you cannot complain of me, Désirée."

But Désirée was not mollified. People might eat her chops, or not eat them—she did not care. Thank heaven, she was independent, and need not be any one's servant. She might sit with her arms folded all day long, if she liked; ay, and have a house of her own, too. In vain, Madame Lavigne apologized, coaxed, and entreated; Désirée was not to be moved, and after once more recapitulating her wrongs, and dwelling with scornful emphasis on the fact of the chop not being done enough, she left the room, with a sneer at the waste and ruin to be perpetrated by the blind woman's future servant.

The lamentations of Madame Lavigne were loud

and deep. She hated that old Désirée, she did; but she could not do without her.

"You see what your cruel want of sympathy has done, Rose," she exclaimed, throwing, as usual, all the blame on her patient niece. "You are the cause of it all. That old Désirée is as sour as vinegar, but I could trust her with untold gold. Go down to her directly; she has a stupid sort of liking for you: and you may tell her, too, that I shall make her a present one of these days."

Rose left her seat. Nathalie, who now stood ready to depart, followed her sister out of the room; she felt too indignant to address Madame Lavigne with even common civility.

"Wait for me here," said Rose, pausing in the passage, and entering the dark kitchen, where Désirée had retired to brood over her wrongs.

Rose addressed the servant. Nathalie could not hear what her sister said, for she spoke in a low tone, and stood turned away from her; but she heard Désirée's reply.

"Stay, Mamzelle Rose! Not I. She shall have another servant soon, and one who will rob her, I hope."

Still Rose urged something, which did not reach Nathalie's ear.

"And why should I stay," sharply asked Désirée, "to please that selfish old creature?"

"She has had much to try her," said Rose, gently; "her husband beat and ill-used her."

"Serve her right," muttered Désirée.

"The son whom she loved robbed and deserted her; and now she is a blind, infirm, and aged woman."

"And is that a reason why she should torment every one around her, and make a martyr of you? I am more than a match for her; but you—so patient, so enduring! It has often made my blood boil to see how she used you; and, believe me, I have avenged you many a time: but that is over now."

"Then you will go," said Rose.

"Why should I stay? she hates me in her heart, and you are so quiet, that you will not miss me much."

"And so," continued Rose, "the face that has been a familiar one for so many years shall be replaced by that of a stranger."

Désirée peered wistfully into her face.

"Will you miss me, then, when I am gone?" she asked, "will you miss the cross old woman, who never had a kind word for you, nor for anybody else?"

"I shall miss you, Désirée," was the low reply.

"Then you do care for me, after all; quiet as you are, you do care for me. Ah! Mamzelle Rose, how can this be?"

"Because, God help me, I have had few or none to love," exclaimed Rose, in a tone of deep and involuntary sadness. "Will you stay?" she added, after a pause.

Désirée looked at her; then turned away abruptly.

" I shall see," she said, in a rough tone, and evidently wishing to close the conversation.

Rose left her without pressing the subject further; she understood Désirée, her temper, and her ways, and knew that the point was won.

" Oh ! Rose, Rose," exclaimed Nathalie, as her sister stood once more by her side, " is this to live ?"

" It is the will of God," replied Rose, in a low tone.

She said this very simply, without false humility or empty denial of sacrifice, but like one to whom that holy will had become the daily sanctification of existence. And as she spoke, a smile of singular sweetness broke over her pale features, whilst something of the light which illumes the martyr's glance passed in her eyes; the lingering and dearly-bought triumph of a spirit nature had made proud, and which will and faith alone had rendered meek.

Nathalie said nothing, but taking her sister's thin hand, she reverently raised it to her lips as they parted.

CHAPTER IX.

NATHALIE truly loved her sister; but, from witnessing such scenes, she always entered Madame Lavigne's house with regret, and left it with relief. She now breathed more freely, as the gloomy door closed behind her; and when she reached the old château, standing on the brow of the hill, in the clear sunlight, with its airy turrets rising against the blue sky—when she entered the broad avenue, with its stately elms, and passed beneath the majestic portico, Nathalie forgot the doubts and fears of Rose. "What matter about the future," she thought; "it is good to be here!"

She found the Canoness sitting at the end of the lime-tree avenue, and engaged in a very close conversation with Amanda. She looked pleased, though a little disconcerted, on seeing Nathalie. The discreet *femme-de-chambre* quietly retired.

"Do you feel too tired for a walk over the grounds, this lovely morning?" asked Aunt Radegonde.

"I never feel tired," replied Nathalie, taking her arm, with a smile.

But the Canoness was not ready yet; there was an immense shawl to be wrapt round her person, to fall down in graceful folds, like a theatrical mantle, and sweep the alley like a train, before she could think of moving a step.

"Amanda is a nice girl," said the Canoness, as they took a narrow path, with a row of tall trees on one side, and a smoothly-shaved lawn extending far away on the other, "but she must be kept at a distance. Take an elderly woman's advice, child; never make free with servants."

"I must do like you," said Nathalie, smiling demurely.

"Exactly," answered the Canoness, with a complacent nod. "*Entre nous*, Petite, I do pique myself on the art of keeping subordinates at a distance, without *hauteur*—that would be unkind—but with that sense of dignity which is incumbent on one who may be said to be the head of the family."

Nathalie glanced down at the insignificant little figure by her side; but Aunt Radegonde was quite in earnest, and feelingly lamented the serious responsibility fate had thrown upon her.

"We are quite alone to-day," resumed the Canoness, with one of her abrupt transitions. "Rosalie is gone to spend a few days with the De Jussacs. Armand is gone also," she added, after a pause.

"With Madame Marceau?" quickly said Nathalie.

"No; to Marmont. To say the truth, Petite, he does not care much about the De Jussacs; but do not say I told you so;—it is quite a secret. I feel rather tired; shall we rest awhile?"

A bench stood near them, beneath a sycamore; they sat down.

"Then we are quite alone to-day?" carelessly said Nathalie.

"Quite. Armand does not come home to dinner."

"How often you are deprived of his company; you must feel it very much."

The Canoness coughed.

"Of course, of course," she slowly replied.

"And how harassing those frequent journeys must prove to Monsieur de Sainville."

"Not at all, Petite. Armand's property is at Marmont, and he likes to superintend it himself; besides, he is rather restless."

"Restless, Marraine! and his manner is so quiet!"

"Quiet!" echoed the Canoness, shaking her head. "Ah, well!"

She closed her eyes, and pursed up her lips. Nathalie said nothing; she was looking thoughtfully at the little lake lying beneath the old cedar-tree, beyond the lawn before her.

"My dear," suddenly asked the Canoness, "did you say that Armand was quiet?"

"I only spoke of my impression."

"Ah! but it is very dangerous to have wrong impressions, especially about the tempers of people

with whom we live; and though I am singularly reserved—Nature was in a reserved mood when she fashioned me, Petite—and never open my lips on family matters, I think it proper to set you right in this point. Armand is not at all quiet, my dear; he is rather——" She hesitated.

"Irritable?" suggested Nathalie.

"No; for it is most difficult to vex him."

"Passionate, perhaps?"

"He never gets into a passion; but he is not quiet. Some think him a little stern; I do not at all, of course; but being his aunt, it is not likely he would presume to show anything of the kind with me. But the other day, when you spoke to him in the library, did you not think him rather severe, Petite?"

And the little Canoness, inclining her head on one side, looked wonderfully interested.

"Oh, no!" calmly answered Nathalie.

"Ah, well! I dare say not; indeed, my dear, if I ask, it is solely for your benefit. Take it as a rule, that reserved people, like me, are never inquisitive. Also, if I speak of Armand, it is merely to enlighten you; and though you are very reserved, I can see that you understand me."

"I fear I am very dull, madame, for I assure you I did not understand——"

"I am a little deaf to-day," quickly interrupted the Canoness, "but do not mind repeating. As I was saying, Armand's cold manner signifies nothing; —he can be very kind, very generous."

"Kindness and generosity are his characteristics, then," said Nathalie, almost involuntarily.

"Yes," hesitatingly replied the Canoness. "You see he has a very strong sense of duty, iron will, and some pride, and so——But, *à propos*, this reminds me of what I said yesterday, about not refusing any little civility Armand might offer you. I had a motive for that, as I have for everything I say. I could see by his manner, he felt friendly towards you. I learned this morning that my penetration had not deceived me."

Nathalie looked up inquiringly.

"Yes, this morning, Armand sent me a very respectful little note, requesting the favour of an interview. I granted it, of course. He came to my boudoir, and, in that deferential manner with which he always addresses me, he asked my opinion of you: 'Did I think you were happy here? Was not the place too dull for so young a girl—almost a child?'"

"A child!" exclaimed Nathalie, colouring; "why, I am eighteen."

"You only look sixteen; so it comes to the same."

"But to look younger does not take away actual years," quickly said Nathalie.

"Yes, it does," quite as quickly rejoined the Canoness. "A friend—a very particular friend of mine, looks full ten years younger than her real age; I contend that she is ten years younger."

"But that friend of yours is not old."

"She is not very young. But, Petite, take my advice, do not use the word old: it is not refined. 'An old woman!' can anything be more odious: always say, 'elderly,'—'an elderly lady.' Well, as I was saying, Armand asked me 'if the place was not too dull for so young a girl, almost a child, and one too who seemed even more gay and thoughtless than most girls of her age.'"

"Thanks to Aunt Radegonde's reserve, I am likely to hear a very flattering account of myself," thought Nathalie, with a rising colour and somewhat scornful look.

The Canoness continued. "I told him that I thought you quite happy, but that it would be best to ask you; that I had no doubt you would answer truly. 'Quite my opinion,' he replied; 'I saw from the first she was a very artless little thing.' *Chère* Petite, I was so pleased. Monsieur de Sainville likes candour above all things, and detests equivocating people. But though I had solved his doubts he was not satisfied; I could see better than he could himself what he wished;—men do not understand those things; and so I suggested that you should stay here as my companion: he agreed, provided you consented. So, Petite, it rests with you now to say, yes or no." She looked up at the young girl with evident anxiety.

Nathalie's eyes were bent upon the earth. She raised them at last, and there was something in her look and in the smile that now parted her lips, which

Aunt Radegonde, with all her penetration, could not fathom.

"You are good,—truly good," said she, in a low tone.

"Then you consent; I am so glad. Come, I feel quite rested, and as you are never tired, we will go on. Petite, you look pensive?" she added, as they resumed their walk.

"Madame——"

"How often must I tell you to call me, Marraine."

"Well, then, dear Marraine," said Nathalie, laying her hand on the arm of the Canoness;" allow me to ask if Madame Marceau knows of this?"

"Madame Marceau!" echoed the Canoness, drawing up her little figure with an air of offended dignity; "and what has my niece to do with my affairs? If instead of one companion I chose to have two,—ay, or twenty, Rosalie would not presume to interfere."

Nathalie smiled, and made an apology which immediately soothed the placable Canoness, who assured her that Madame Marceau would be quite as much pleased as herself, or Monsieur de Sainville.

"Then Monsieur de Sainville is pleased?"

"Yes, Petite; he said he did not think I should regret this plan. 'I am sure I shall not,' I replied; 'she is a good child; I saw it instantly, and my first glance never deceives me.' 'Yes,' said he, 'she has a pleasant face; and though the old schoolmistress wished me to believe her of a most violent and

fiery temper, I think for my part she is only a little petulant.'"

"Only a little petulant!" echoed Nathalie, stopping short in the path with indignant amazement.

"Yes. So you see he has quite a favourable opinion of you: otherwise you may believe I should never have repeated all this."

"Indeed, I am much obliged to Monsieur de Sainville," replied Nathalie, speaking very fast. "A child, more gay and thoughtless than most girls of her age,—an artless little thing with a pleasant face, and only a little petulant! How flattering!"

"Yes, Petite, and he would not speak so of every one; for he is rather hard to please."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, there is beautiful Mademoiselle de Jussac, whom he scarcely allows to be pretty. When Rosalie talks of her wit and talent, he says he cannot discover that she has much of either; he confesses, however, that she has the quality he most prizes in woman: gentleness."

"Indeed!" again said Nathalie. There was a long pause.

"Here is the green-house," said Aunt Radegonde; "are you fond of flowers, Petite?"

A sudden turning of the path brought them within view of the green-house, as she spoke. It was a light elegant rotunda, supported by pillars, and standing on a flight of circular steps in the centre of a small green lawn. A grove of firs and cypress-trees

sheltered it from the northern winds; it shone amidst their dark foliage like a white Grecian temple, sacred to the worship of some solitary wood nymph. One of the wide arched windows was open to admit to the flowers and shrubs within, the warm sun of noon and the soft breezes of the south.

"But this does not look at all like a green-house," exclaimed Nathalie, recognizing the temple-like building she had seen from her window.

"It was a ball-room formerly; and the first ball given there was opened by my aunt, Mademoiselle Adelaide de Sainville, when I was quite a child. *Chère* Petite, it was very beautiful! The trees around were all hung with lamps, and within, the hall was lit so brilliantly, that it looked here like a blaze of light. The orchestra, hidden in a recess of foliage, played the sweetest music imaginable; whilst lovely ladies and gallant-looking gentlemen moved along in their stately minuets,—not foolish quadrilles. And I verily believe I never saw such handsome women as I beheld that night. There was tall and handsome Mademoiselle d'Albe, with eyes brighter than her jewels, and a handsome neck she used to arch so proudly. She walked up and down the hall in an interval of the dance, with a whole bevy of gentlemen hanging about her, for she was witty as she was beautiful: poor thing! they say she walked to the guillotine with the same stately step. Then there were the three Mesdemoiselles de Moustier, all in white and lovely as angels; and Madame d'Estang, who danced

so well, and had the prettiest foot ever seen; and Madame de Merville, whose voice sounded like a silver bell; and many more besides: but, handsome as they all were, my aunt Adelaide was the queen of the ball."

"Was she so very beautiful?"

"Beautiful! Ah! Petite, women are not what they once were. There certainly never lived a lovelier creature than my aunt. There was grace in every one of her movements, and a charm beyond every thing in her look and her smile. She was rather dark, but her eyes were so deep and soft. In short, you may judge of her beauty, Petite, by the fact that Monsieur de Sainville, though so critical, admits it. I have a portrait of her up stairs, which I will show you. Will you come in and look at the flowers?"

They entered. Flowers of varied scent and hue everywhere greeted their gaze. Some stood together in gaily contrasted groups; others, pale, star-like things, gleamed in solitary beauty through their dark leaves; fresh garden blossoms, exotics rare and frail, delicate heaths, dark orchidæ, of fantastic shape, and large wax-like flowers from many a far and foreign land, were gathered there. As Nathalie now slowly paced, with the little Canoness, that long-deserted ball-room, which had once echoed to the gay sounds of the dance, and heard the hum of pleasant voices, she thought of the brilliant scene Aunt Radegonde had beheld there; she thought of the long-faded

beauties, as perishable and as lovely as the frail flowers she now saw; of their gay smiles and bright looks, of their short-lived pleasures, and evening triumphs still more brief.

"If it were night," said she, in a thoughtful tone, "I should feel quite timid here."

"Timid! Why so, Petite?"

"I should fancy the place haunted. Take away the blue sky, the sunlight, and the cheerful day; imagine night abroad, making all things shadowy, vast and dim; those dark cypresses rising against almost as dark a sky; the moon shedding her soft, pale light on the green sward, and stealing in through the half-open casement, just revealing enough to make you fear all that she leaves in mysterious shadow. Imagine all these things, and I assure you, aunt, those fair flowers, now so bright and gay, will become as the pale spirits of the lovely ladies you described awhile ago. Look at that fuschia, so slender and elegant, with its purple bells,—there is majesty in all its bending grace: it is handsome Mademoiselle d'Albe covered with jewels; those green and erect laurels are her suitors; the three delicate camellias, standing apart, are the three fair sisters; that lively little yellow flower, up there by itself, and still dancing to the breeze, must be the lady with the pretty foot; and the modest, retiring-looking blue bell is as surely her of the clear, harmonious voice. As for your beautiful aunt, behold her there in that fair royal lily, the queen of all around her; how serene,

how lovely she looks; and as the breeze just bends her stately head, how gracefully she seems to perform the honours of the revel!"

The Canoness looked puzzled. She glanced at the flowers, and from them to Nathalie. The young girl was standing near her in a thoughtful attitude, her head slightly averted, her cheek supported by her hand, in a way familiar to her, her look slowly wandering over the graceful flowers her fancy had for a moment conjured up into the long-vanished guests of the lonely hall. A stream of golden light from the autumn sun fell on her through the open window, and as it mellowed into a sunny brown the waves of her jet black hair, and gave to the brilliant bloom of her cheek a rosy hue as soft and yet as warm as that with which the setting sun lights up the western sky, Aunt Radegonde thought that, to none of the bright southern flowers gathered there, did that light lend a richer warmth and more fervid radiance.

"Petite," she said, smiling, "you are very romantic. You must surely be descended from one of those old Provençal troubadours, both poets and knights, who wandered over Europe,—now jousting at tournaments, now singing at floral games, or helping fair ladies to hold and preside over courts of love."

Nathalie looked up with a merry laugh, and the clear, silvery sounds awoke in the old hall echoes to which it had long been a stranger.

"Hush!" said she mysteriously, "we must not laugh,—the place is haunted; and surely there never

was a more pleasant ghost-chamber; but the perfumes of these fine ladies make one feel quite faint; shall we not go and leave them to their enchanted solitude?"

They left the place as she spoke. As they took the path that led homewards, Nathalie turned back to give one last look and see, as she said, that the flowers had not resumed their original shapes as soon as their backs were turned. But the spell which bound them—if spell there was—remained unbroken: the white temple rose silent as ever in its bower of dark northern trees, and the soft breeze of noon still brought low-whispered tidings from without to the captive beauties of the old hall.

"It was a happy idea," thoughtfully said Nathalie, "to convert that gay ball-room into a green-house;—beauties and flowers! The transition is very poetic."

"But not intentional, Petite; Armand not being romantic like you; and but for his passion for flowers——"

"Has Monsieur de Sainville a passion for flowers?" quickly asked Nathalie.

"Indeed he has; they are the only luxury in which he indulges. His room and the library are always full of flowers, and he comes here every morning to inspect the progress of his favourites."

"He called them frivolous, transient things, the other day," exclaimed Nathalie.

"Oh, did he?" said the Canoness, with a slow cough.—Nathalie began to understand that sign.—

"Well, you see, Monsieur de Sainville is peculiar, and being peculiar he has peculiarities. He never says he is fond of flowers,—he never speaks of them indeed; and if he did speak of them, I dare say it would be disparagingly. I conclude he is fond of them from observation. I observe a great deal,—he may think them frivolous, valueless things, and yet like them; you understand. But we will change the subject."

She looked mysterious, and uneasy, as she always did when speaking of her nephew, and the conversation was continued on ordinary topics until they reached the château. Aunt Radegonde then bade the young girl go up to her room, take off her things, and significantly advised her to trust herself to the guidance of Amanda, when she wished to join her. The femme-de-chambre looked fully as mysterious when Nathalie, having invoked her assistance, asked her whither she was leading her along those dark passages and strange-looking staircases? "She had been forbidden to tell; but mademoiselle would soon know." She paused as she spoke, before a door, which she opened with the intimation "that this was the boudoir of Madame la Chanoinesse."

Nathalie entered, and by the octagon shape of the room, perceived it was a turret chamber, similar to her own. Small as the apartment originally was, the variety of objects it contained, rendered it smaller still; yet there was no confusion, and all was tastefully arranged.

"What a *bonbonnière!*" exclaimed Nathalie, glancing around her admiringly; "a perfect jewel."

"Little flatterer," said Aunt Radegonde, reprovingly; but her face beamed with pleasure.

"I never saw such a place," continued Nathalie, still standing in the centre of the room, and examining everything; "how beautiful and soft the light comes in through those rose-coloured curtains; and that delicate paper with flowers so fresh, that they look ready to be gathered. Oh! Aunt Radegonde, there is only one explanation possible: you are a fairy, and this is your bower."

She turned as she spoke towards the Canoness, who, chilly as usual, was seated by the fire-side. With her gold cross, her handsome black dress of rich brocade donned for the occasion, her cap, and ruffles of rare old lace, her soft white hands demurely folded on her knees, and her Cinderella feet, which, to use her own phraseology, had turned so many heads in her younger days, coquettishly resting on a cushion—she looked very fairy-like indeed.

"Petite," she answered smiling, "you have childish fancies."

"You are a fairy," decisively resumed Nathalie, who saw very well this last fancy was not at all displeasing, "and I will prove it. It was a fairy needle wrought these embroidered chairs; it is a fairy's hand that daily tends those exquisite flowers in their bed of moss; a fairy brought those beautifully tinted shells from the deep sea, and enchanted that bird in its

golden cage. The last crowning proof of all is, that the whole place not being larger than a good-sized nut-shell, none but a fairy could live in it."

"But you see it will hold two."

"And I dare say, it could even hold three; four it could not. Well might Amanda lead me along such tortuous staircases and mysterious passages! I suppose you throw a spell over the place, like Peri Baoou over her palace, in the old Arabian tale. Shall it sometimes be visible for me?"

"Always," was the gracious reply. "I have not often been here of late; but now I will come. You shall have a key to enter when you please."

"Delightful!" said Nathalie, gaily; "and I promise you to do as I did to-day, when, actuated by a presentiment of the truth, I attired myself in my best to pay you all proper honour."

"And you look very well, Petite," approvingly replied the Canoness, attentively eyeing the young girl, who was now seated on a low settee opposite her; "look at yourself. It must be your white dress and the pink curtains behind."

Obeying the injunction of the Canoness, Nathalie looked up; in the depths of the large mirror before her she saw a graceful figure clad in a light white robe, leaning on one elbow, and half-bending forward, with a look and attitude that became it well. She saw it with its clear brow and soft dark eyes, and her lips parted with a smile, as she slowly turned her look away. She knew that the vision which had greeted

her gaze was beautiful and bright, but beautiful of its own beauty; that no toilet's meretricious art had given harmony to those graceful features, symmetry to the bending figure, and that the pure bloom of the clear cheek was not borrowed from the curtain's rosy hue. She turned towards the Canoness as if struck with a sudden thought.

"You said you would show me the portrait of your aunt."

"Look behind, on your right, child."

Nathalie turned quickly round. On either side of the window was a female portrait; that which the Canoness had designated, represented a richly attired lady of singular loveliness. Dark-haired, dark-eyed, with arched eyebrows, a clear profile, cheeks like the peach, and ripe smiling lips—she seemed the gay, handsome creature Nathalie had imagined; but though she looked at the portrait long and fixedly, she said nothing.

"Do you not think it handsome?" asked the Canoness.

"Yes," slowly answered the young girl, looking at the other picture as she spoke.

This painting was greatly inferior as a work of art to the other, but it represented a young girl in all the grace and freshness of youthful beauty. Curls of thick clustering hair of that *blond-cendré* so much esteemed in France, shaded features so exquisitely lovely, that Nathalie thought they must belong to some ideal being. The deep blue eyes, transparent

complexion, and half-parted lips, displaying the pearly teeth within, rendered the whole countenance inexpressibly charming.

This time, Nathalie's admiration was fully expressed.

"What a lovely countenance!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, I told you so."

"Oh! I do not mean your aunt Adelaide, but this portrait."

"Oh! this." The Canoness spoke slowly. She looked up at the picture, and shaded her eyes with her hand, as if to see it better.

"Is it a portrait, and a good likeness?" continued Nathalie.

Receiving no reply, she turned round. The little Canoness was looking at the picture in the same attitude, but her hand shook visibly, and her eyes were dim. Nathalie stood silent and astonished; gazing by stealth at the lovely face that seemed to be smiling down on her, and wondering what sad story could be linked with those serene features.

"The fire is very low," abruptly said the Canoness, as Nathalie resumed her seat; she stooped to arrange it, and though the fire burned brightly, the task took her long to accomplish. Nathalie took up a book from the table—it was the Revue—and opened at the tale "Mystère." She laid it down pettishly.

"I detest that tale!" she said. The Canoness was leaning back in her chair, grave, thoughtful, and unusually silent. She did not answer, and did not seem to have heard her. "Do you think the author

means to say that mad girl will marry that bad man?" continued Nathalie, wishing to break through this awkward silence.

"Petite," said the Canoness, with sudden earnestness, "do you ever think of marriage?"

"Sometimes—not often," replied Nathalie, a little surprised.

The Canoness shook her head solemnly.

"I wish the answer had been 'Never.'"

"Is it such a dangerous thought?" asked Nathalie, laughing.

"When I make observations," said Aunt Radegonde, drawing herself up with an offended air, "I expect them to be listened to with due gravity; but no matter."

The little Canoness was not one of those whose reproaches could rouse Nathalie to defiance; far from it. She rose quickly, and, walking up to Aunt Radegonde's chair, looked, as she felt, touched and sorry.

"I did not mean to be rude,—indeed I did not," she said, very earnestly; "and you are so good," she added, in a half-arch, half-coaxing tone, "that I do not think you can be angry very long."

"Oh! Petite," replied the placable Canoness, making Nathalie sit down on the cushion at her feet, and eyeing her wistfully, as she laid her hand on her shoulder; "how is it that when I see a young girl like you, thoughtless, handsome, and happy, my heart yearns towards her at once? And if you had not laughed, I would have given you some good advice."

"To which I shall listen very attentively now," soothingly said Nathalie.

"You will not be the first that has done so," replied the Canoness, with a touch of consequence; "nor yet the first gay child that has sat thus at my feet, and looked into my face," she added, in a sad and lower tone. Her lips trembled, and again her eyes grew dim.

"And the advice?" quickly said Nathalie.

Aunt Radegonde was once more consequential and erect.

"It shall be on that point most important, most fatal to woman—marriage! But, perhaps, Petite, you may yet determine to lead a life of celibacy, like me?"

"Is it not good to be prepared for every emergency?" demurely asked Nathalie.

"True, Petite; well, then, to be methodical, we will divide that advice under three heads,—the man you wish to have, the man who wishes to have you, and the man you ought to have."

A mischievous smile played on Nathalie's features.

"Could we not blend those three characters into one?" she asked, very gravely.

"Impossible!" cried the Canoness, looking shocked at this heterodox suggestion; "why they are three wholly different individuals. The man you wish to have sees it—they always see it, and he becomes a tyrant: they always are tyrants in such cases. The man who wishes to have you is exacting, jealous, and

will fret your life away. But the man you ought to have has esteem and affection for you, just as you have esteem and affection for him. You have exactly the same tastes, the same feelings; you always agree, you never quarrel—nature made you for one another."

"Marraine," very quickly said Nathalie, "I will never have him; he is good, honest, an excellent cousin, brother, or uncle, all whose offices nature has evidently destined him to fulfil, but I will never have him."

"Who, then, will you have?" asked the Canoness, very gravely.

"Why, if I must choose, one of the other two."

"But which of the two?"

"The one who likes me," replied Nathalie, after a brief pause given to reflection; "I shall rather fancy receiving incense and adoration,—being a sort of household divinity."

"Well," said Aunt Radegonde, with a sigh, "I am glad you did not at least choose the other one, for *he* is the worst of the three."

"But why is *he* the worst?" asked Nathalie, amused at the gravity with which she spoke of those imaginary characters.

"Because you like him, and he knows it. Petite, you do not know that man: he is proud, exacting, and would find fault with an angel of light. Give a woman the beauty of a goddess, the wisdom of a sage, the temper of a saint,—he will find fault with her still. If she is plain, she ought to be handsome; if

she is handsome, beauty is but dross; if she is spirited, he calls her shrew; if gentle, tame; if she is prudent, he finds her cold-hearted; and giddy if she is a little gay."

"Why, what a morose, disagreeable man!" exclaimed Nathalie, very indignantly; "and yet, proud as he is," she added, after a pause, "he too could be made to stoop."

"You do not know him," said the Canoness, shaking her head: "you do not know him; how proud, how jealous, how exacting the love he receives has made him. Let us take an imaginary case,—quite imaginary, you understand."

"Yes, imaginary; but about him."

"About him and a young girl—any young girl."

"Yes, any young girl. Shall she be beautiful?"

"Very beautiful."

"As beautiful—I mean as good-looking as your Aunt Adelaide."

"More, Petite, more—she shall be the fairest creature eye ever saw, as gentle and winning as she is lovely."

"What! is she all this, and does he not love her?" impatiently exclaimed Nathalie.

"He does, Petite. Not love her! it would not be in human nature. Stern, forbidding as he is, he shall never speak to her in the same voice in which he speaks to others; he shall never look at her with the same look: but some are as inexorable in their love as others in their hatred, and *he*, Petite, is one of them."

She spoke in a low impressive tone, but Nathalie looked up at her smilingly.

"If she loves him, and he loves her," she said softly, "where can the mischief be?"

"Oh! Petite," sorrowfully replied Aunt Radegonde, "you are a child, and, child-like, you think that to be young, pretty, and loving is enough."

"And why is it not enough?" earnestly asked Nathalie.

"Because much love has made him exacting; he will be over her as an inexorable judge that forgives nothing."

"But where there is affection, it is so easy to forgive."

"Not for him—not for him."

"Then he is vindictive."

"No; for he does not avenge the wrong; but neither does he forget it."

"But what does she do to vex him? She must do something; what is it?"

"We will suppose anything," said the Canoness, after a pause; "for you do not forget this is quite imaginary."

"Oh! yes,—quite imaginary."

"Well, then, we will suppose that he is called away; she remains at home, sorrowful and pining."

"I see, I see," interrupted Nathalie, in her impatient way, "he is faithless; whilst she—oh! she, would wait for him for ever. He is a very bad man.

I do not like him at all," she added, with great warmth.

The Canoness looked a little disconcerted.

"No, Petite; it is not exactly so. You see, she loves him; but she is so gentle, so good, that she will sacrifice herself: in short, it is an old story; they make her promise to marry another."

"Then she does not love him!" exclaimed Nathalie.

"Yes, she does; but she is yielding gentleness itself. Well, he returns in time to save her; for he can save her: and though the man they would give her to is young, handsome, rich, and enamoured, she would far sooner have her old love. Well, what do you think he does?"

"He leaves her to the fate she has chosen," indignantly exclaimed Nathalie; "and he does well."

A flush rose to the brow of the Canoness; the hand, which still rested on the shoulders of the young girl was hastily withdrawn.

"You justify him," said she, eyeing her almost sternly; "you condemn her to misery!"

"Misery! No. She, who was weak to love, shall be weak to suffer; she shall marry, be unhappy for awhile, and then be comforted, and forget."

"Oh! you arrange it thus, do you?" replied Aunt Radegonde, with a sad and somewhat bitter smile; "but why should it surprise me? I have always noticed it: the young are severe, and very hard.

Well, then, since you understand all this so well, tell me what becomes of him."

"He suffers, but does not complain."

"Suffer! How can he suffer? Did he not reject her willingly?"

"He rejected her, because it was not the woman he wanted,—but the love of the woman. How could he care for it, once faith was gone, and her truth was broken? Do not think he feels nothing," she added, warming with her subject. "Oh! he still loves, but with the brooding, vengeful love of the wronged heart. He bitterly regrets the past, but he repents nothing; he would still cast her from him, though his own heart should break, or, worse, bleed for ever."

She spoke so earnestly, that her eyes grew dim, and her lips trembled. There was a pause.

"Petite," said the Canoness, in her usual tone, and once more laying her hand on the young girl's shoulder, whilst she eyed her thoughtfully, "you grieved me so much awhile ago, that I thought I should never forgive you,—never love you again. But now I see you spoke from ignorance: how should you know the truth? You have not lived the years I have lived, nor seen the sad things I have seen. You give to her the heartlessness of man,—to him the enduring, even though resentful love of woman. His heart break! Any man's heart break! You simple child, know that it is she who dies of grief, and he—why he lives on. But, oh! Petite, you may have

your own sorrows, your own trials yet; do not be so severe."

"But all this is imaginary, is it not?" asked Nathalie, hesitatingly.

"Why you did not think it was real, did you?" quickly asked the Canoness.

"How could I?"

"No; of course you could not."

"Well, then, since it is imaginary," said Nathalie, "what does it prove? *He*," she smiled as she emphasized the word, "*he* is the corner-stone of your edifice; remove him, the rest falls to the earth. Now, as he is unreal——"

"Petite," interrupted the Canoness, "he is not unreal."

"He is not!"

"No. Do you remember I once spoke to you of a certain person?"

"Whom you called 'that person,'" quickly rejoined Nathalie.

"He and that person are much alike; and the woman for whom that person will break his heart is not born, and will never exist."

"You think so," thoughtfully said Nathalie.

"I know it. Nay, more; I always had the presentiment no woman could or would love him; that she would have more fear than love in her heart. I am not superstitious, Petite, though I might be so, having had some extraordinary dreams and presentiments, which *never* deceived me; but in that pre-

sentiment I always believed;—ay, though he was neither fool nor coward, nor any of those things women hate by instinct, I always felt he could not win love."

"But why so?"

"Because he was too proud, too unbending, to yield us the homage nature has made ours by right," replied the Canoness, drawing up her little figure in all the majesty of feminine dignity.

Nathalie's lip curled with a haughty smile.

"What! is he so proud as that?" she said, disdainfully. "I should like to see him humbled—ay, thoroughly."

"But you never will, Petite," quickly rejoined the Canoness.

"Why not?" promptly asked Nathalie.

"In the first place, because he will not allow himself to be humbled; in the second, because he is no visitor here. You must not think, Petite," she added, smiling shrewdly at the momentary disappointment expressed by Nathalie's features, "that I should be so indiscreet as to describe, in such peculiar terms, too, a person you could recognize. No; I am very reserved; and, take my word for it, you will never recognize 'that person' in any of our guests."

Nathalie looked up, and smiled a peculiar smile.

"I shall not try," she replied, quietly.

"No, do not; but profit by my example, and make reserve your rule of conduct. And, Petite," she earnestly added, "will you not meditate on that

other advice I gave on that point most important, most fatal to woman,—marriage? Remember! divided under three heads: the man you wish to have (but as I have shown, the very last you ought to have); the man who wishes to have you; and the man,—mark, Petite,—the man you *ought* to have."

"But whom I will not have at all," quickly rejoined Nathalie. "No, indeed, I cannot," she added, very gravely, and noticing the Canoness's look of chagrin, "I give you my word I cannot. He is a good, honest sort of man,—a great deal too good for me; I know I ought to like him, *mais c'est plus fort que moi*," she added, with a very decisive wave of the hand.

The Canoness remonstrated, a little peevishly; "he was," she declared, "the only good one of the three." But Nathalie was rebellious, and would not hear of him.

The contest lasted long, and was not yet over when they were called to their early and quiet dinner. The subject being then dropped, was not resumed subsequently.

CHAPTER X.

Evening was come; the Canoness had fallen asleep in her chair by the fire-side, whilst Nathalie loitered about the room, inspecting and admiring the various treasures of petrified birds' nests, miniature boxes, fairy-looking baskets, and specimens of rare old china gathered in the little boudoir. After sleeping for about an hour, Aunt Radegonde awoke; to her dismay the fire had burned out; the room looked lonely.

"Petite, where are you?" she exclaimed, in a tone of chagrin.

The rose-coloured curtains opened, and Nathalie stood smiling before her.

"I came here when you fell asleep," she replied.

"When I fell asleep!" exclaimed the Canoness, in a nettled tone. "I was not sleeping, Petite; but I do often fall into a meditative mood after dinner, and I was particularly meditative this evening. What

were you doing near that cool window?" she added, as Nathalie resumed her seat.

"I was watching the wind."

"Watching the wind, Petite? How strangely you talk! The wind is invisible."

"Not so invisible but that, like most mysterious people, he betrays himself by his deeds; therefore have I been watching him whistling round the corner of this turret."

"And what did the wind say?"

"Wonderful things, no doubt, but which, not being a fairy, like you, I could not understand; but I can tell you what he did: he tossed the chimneys about, knocked down a flowerpot or two from an upper story; pleaded in a soft, pitiful voice to get in at this window, and not being admitted, moaned away along the avenue, and spitefully smashed one of the branches of those great trees."

"*Ah! mon Dieu!*" uneasily said the Canoness; "what a boisterous night! I dislike the wind; it sounds so very dreary."

"But it is nothing at all here," observed Nathalie, smiling. "I recollect an old château in Provence, something like this, but standing by the sea-side, and uninhabited, save by an old housekeeper, who let me roam about at will, for I was a child then, and something of a favourite with her. There was a long gallery—a picture gallery once, but then almost bare, and very dreary, where the wind seemed to hold his peculiar revels, and never since have I heard anything

so unearthly. I know not how it was, but the sound always seemed to come from behind me. I would walk very slowly along, listening, for sometimes his windship picked his steps as daintily as any lady, then he suddenly quickened his pace and I quickened mine as well; it seemed a race between us: we reached the door together; I darted out without even once looking behind me, and flew down stairs breathless between pleasure and fear."

"Then you were afraid?"

"Mortally afraid; and there was the charm. That gallery was to me as a ghost story whispered by the fire-side, or a Radcliffe romance read with a solitary candle in a lonely bedroom. The old garden, full of poplars, was nearly as pleasant: it was delightful to stand in their deep shadow, listening to the rustling above, and when the breeze became more keen, and swept down the avenue, to feel it blowing my hair back, and scarcely allowing me to catch my breath. Oh! our Provence is a pleasant place; and how often in Mademoiselle Dantin's dull school-room have I longed to be away, to stand in that solitary avenue thick with fallen leaves, for just one short quarter of an hour, to listen to the wind and the poplars again."

"Petite," said the Canoness, bending forward, "you must not talk so; you are getting excited."

"It is the wind," gaily replied Nathalie.

"Ah!" thoughtfully observed Aunt Radegonde, "you are like my kitten, Minette, who, poor little thing, always gets frisky in windy weather."

"Am I frisky to-night?" asked Nathalie, with flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes.

"Very much so; and to keep you in proper order, I shall give you this knitting to finish."

Nathalie took the knitting, which seemed to produce the desired effect of subduing her spirits, for she fell ere long into a deep reverie, and the quiet prosing of Aunt Radegonde reached her ear, but went no farther. About an hour had thus elapsed when a servant came up with a message from Monsieur de Sainville, desiring to know whether his aunt would allow him to wait upon her. Nathalie, absorbed in her knitting, never stirred or looked up; the Canoness seemed slightly flurried.

"Certainly," she quickly answered; "we shall be very happy to see Monsieur de Sainville. You see, Petite," she added, addressing Nathalie, when the servant had retired; "how deferential Armand is; I assure you he would not think of entering this room without my express permission."

Ere long a step was heard upon the stairs, the door opened, and Monsieur de Sainville entered. The table had to be removed for him to take a seat between his aunt and Nathalie; in spite of all Rose had told, the young girl remained cold and distant. But this was a fact which did not seem to produce a very painful impression upon her host; his discourse indeed was almost exclusively directed to his aunt; the subject, to Nathalie's great disdain, was the result of the crops and the state of the country; from this

there was a transition to the more poetical theme of gardening.

"Mademoiselle Montolieu," said Monsieur de Sainville, suddenly addressing Nathalie," I caused some flowers to be put in the centre of the grassy plot, as you suggested; but they look very gay near the dark yews; they are evidently unsympathetic natures; have you seen them? What do you think of them?"

"I have seen them, sir, and do not like them at all," answered Nathalie.

"Do you think they ought to be removed?"

"Nay, sir; I think they will do to stay, and read a good lesson on the danger of taking and following the advice of the ignorant."

She spoke as demurely as a nun; never once looking towards Monsieur de Sainville to see how he would take this; but as she sat opposite Aunt Radegonde, she could meet her astonished look. There was a pause. The Canoness seemed uncomfortable.

"How very high the wind is," she observed at length, by way of opening the conversation; "do you like to listen to the wind, Armand?"

"The wind, aunt?" he musingly replied. "Why yes, I believe I had some such fancy when I was a boy."

"Ah! well, Petite likes it very much; she stood listening to it for a whole hour this evening."

"You like it?" inquiringly said Monsieur de Sainville, turning towards Nathalie.

"When I have nothing better to do, I like it well enough," she carelessly answered.

"She doats on it," continued the Canoness, without noticing Nathalie's look of vexation; for there was something peculiarly disagreeable to her in being thus made the subject of a conversation addressed to Monsieur de Sainville. "Yes, she does indeed," resumed Aunt Radegonde, too well pleased with so easy a topic of discourse to abandon it in haste. "There was an old château by the sea, somewhere in Provence, with a lonely gallery and an ancient garden, where she used to go, and listen to the wind for hours."

"Mademoiselle Montolieu is romantic," said Monsieur de Sainville, with his peculiar smile.

"Romantic! indeed she is. You should have heard her in the hot-house to-day. She transformed all the flowers into ladies,—gave them names and described their characters."

"Decidedly romantic," continued her nephew. "Fortunately," he added, noticing, perhaps, Nathalie's look of increased annoyance, "she has not reached the age when romance becomes forbidden."

"Oh!" quickly said Nathalie, "I do not wish to avail myself of that plea. I ought to know better, of course, since I am eighteen," she added, a little hesitatingly, and yet unable to resist the temptation of letting Monsieur de Sainville become aware of this important fact. She spoke, moreover, in a tone of quiet dignity destined to inspire him with what, not-

withstanding all his politeness, she greatly doubted that he felt for her—a proper degree of respect.

"Indeed!" said he, very gravely. "Eighteen! Oh! of course, that alters the matter completely. Eighteen! Why, at that age of mature reason and varied experience, the romance of life is quite over."

Nathalie coloured deeply, but kept her eyes fixed on her work; to all appearance, it occupied her completely.

"My dear child!" exclaimed the Canoness, in a tone of dismay, "what can you be thinking of? You are letting down your stitches as fast as you can."

"Oh, no!" quickly answered Nathalie, "it is all right."

"All right! Why, Petite, I saw you dropping the stitches. Show it to me. There, do you see," she added, as Nathalie reluctantly surrendered her work. "*Ah! mon Dieu!*" she continued, with evident consternation, "it is all wrong. Petite! Petite! where can your thoughts have been wandering for the last half-hour?"

"Nowhere, indeed," said Nathalie, very quickly; "but the mistake will soon be mended," she added; and taking the work from the hand of the Canoness, she drew the needles out, and deliberately unravelled it.

Aunt Radegonde eyed her with surprise.

The young girl's clear brow was now slightly overcast; her cheeks were flushed, her lips compressed;

she looked a not unattractive picture of vexation, as she stood on the hearth, her face half-averted, her hands so zealously engaged in unravelling her previous task, that they threatened not to leave any token of her mistake.

"Take care, Petite, take care!" soothingly said the Canoness; "do not go so fast, nor allow yourself to be so easily put out; you will, I fear, meet with greater misfortunes in life than a piece of knitting going wrong. Why, what a strange girl she is," she added, as Nathalie's half-averted features lit up with an arch smile; "there she is laughing; awhile ago she looked ready to cry. It must be the wind makes her so changeable; she confessed to me it made her as frisky as my kitten, Minette." This was uttered confidentially, and addressed to Monsieur de Sainville.

Nathalie coloured to the very temples, and looked far more vexed than before.

"Madame," she quickly cried, "You said that——"

"I did not."

"But what a very peculiar fact," observed Monsieur de Sainville, turning towards Nathalie; "does the wind indeed affect you in that strange manner, mademoiselle?"

Nathalie, who had resumed her seat, laid down her work on her lap, and looking at the speaker, said, with great gravity:

"In what strange manner, sir?"

"Does it affect your spirits, or—I speak, alas, from a practical knowledge of Minette's disposition—your temper? Pray excuse the question; but this is an interesting physiological fact."

Was this meant in earnest, or was it mere trifling? Nathalie did not know; she at all events drew herself up with an air of offended dignity, but it would not do; laughter glanced in her dark eyes, and an irrepressible smile played around the corners of her mouth—compressed in vain.

"No," she demurely replied; "the wind might have affected me so when I was a child, but of course it cannot do so now."

"Ah! of course," said Monsieur de Sainville, smiling; "both feelings and temper have become so calm, so sedate at the mature age of eighteen."

"My dear child!" exclaimed the Canoness, in a nervous tone, "do put by that knitting, or we shall have some new mishap."

The knitting was dropped as if it burned Nathalie's fingers; but scarcely was restored to Aunt Radegonde's safe-keeping when the young girl exclaimed:

"What shall I do? I cannot endure to sit thus, doing nothing."

"You are industrious," said Monsieur de Sainville.

"Industrious! not at all," exclaimed Nathalie, with a look and tone implying a perfect disdain for the compliment; "I cannot endure idleness, simply because it fills me with *ennui*."

"You are right for all that," persisted Monsieur de Sainville, whom Nathalie began to suspect of a desire to teaze her,—a suspicion not wholly displeasing to her childish vanity; "depend upon it, *ennui* was the serpent who tempted Eve, even in Eden."

"Oh! Eve and the serpent," exclaimed the Canoness, catching only the last words; "ah! what a pity Eve was not more reserved."

"You would have been so," observed her nephew, smiling.

"I cannot tell," cautiously replied Aunt Radegonde; "it is imprudent to boast; yet I do think I should have been more reserved. Do you not think you would, Petite?"

Nathalie shook her head dubiously.

"Oh, yes, you would," persisted Aunt Radegonde; "do you not think she would, Armand?"

"Of course," carelessly replied Monsieur de Sainville, who had taken up the Revue, and was slowly turning over its pages.

"You have too good an opinion of me, madame," said Nathalie, addressing the Canoness somewhat coldly; "I should have acted exactly as poor Eve."

"Petite, you cannot tell."

"Yes, I can, for I have done it," was the reply, more prompt than discreet, and perchance Nathalie felt so herself, for she looked somewhat confused as the incautious admission escaped her lips.

"Oh!" said the Canoness, very much astonished.

Monsieur de Sainville laid down the book, and turning slowly on his chair, eyed Nathalie with his calm, penetrating gaze.

"You have tasted the forbidden fruit?" he said at length.

Nathalie hesitated slightly, but she answered "Yes."

"And pray—I ask to be instructed—what sort of taste had it?"

"The taste of experience, I suppose—bitterness."

"And how did you feel after it?"

"Hot and feverish."

"Petite!" interposed the Canoness, who seemed vexed at the freedom of Nathalie's self-accusations; "how can you compare a childish disobedience, for the purpose of securing some forbidden delicacy, with the great disobedience of Eve? It was forbidden knowledge she coveted, you know."

But Nathalie would not avail herself of this excuse, perhaps, because she disdained to do so; perhaps, because the slight smile which curled Monsieur de Sainville's lip told her it would be unavailing.

"And so did I," she answered, quickly; "for good fruit I had in plenty, and therefore did not value; but knowledge, knowledge of good and evil,—forbidden knowledge, was rare and tempting."

"Well," said Monsieur de Sainville, "you are at least frank about it; and really," he added, after a pause, "you speak as if the taste of the apple were still on your lips."

"She speaks very heedlessly," stiffly said the aunt.

"Pray," continued Monsieur de Sainville, without heeding her, "what sort of a shape did the serpent take?"

Nathalie met his keen look very quietly.

"There was no serpent," she answered, smiling, as she thought he looked slightly baffled.

"Oh! an act of your own free will," he observed, somewhat dryly; "much better still."

"No serpent! Then after all, it was not like Eve," put in the Canoness.

Nathalie did not reply.

"Mademoiselle Montolieu," said Monsieur de Sainville, "you are really cruel. After exciting my aunt's curiosity, you stop short."

"My curiosity, Armand; my curiosity, Monsieur de Sainville!" exclaimed the Canoness, laying down her knitting with evident indignation; "well, if I pride myself on anything, it is on not being at all inquisitive."

"I hope you are not in this instance, madame," said Nathalie, very gravely, "for the whole story is so childish, that I assure you it will not bear telling."

"Well, but what is it, Petite?" suddenly asked the Canoness, wholly forgetting that she was not inquisitive; "was it a fruit you tasted?"

"Yes, a fruit."

"And what fruit?"

"The solanum."

"Why, it is a poisonous berry; did you know that?"

"Yes, I knew it."

"And yet you ate it," said the Canoness with evident surprise.

"Aunt," interposed her nephew looking up from the Revue, which he had taken up once more, "do you not see, mademoiselle ate that berry because it was poisonous, which certainly constitutes a great point of resemblance with Eve?"

Nathalie said nothing. The Canoness resumed

"What could your motive be, Petite?"

"Mere childishness; a whim—a fancy."

"A fancy for poisonous berries?" continued Aunt Radegonde; "how very strange!"

"Oh!" hesitatingly replied Nathalie, who now seemed thoroughly annoyed with the subject, "it was not exactly because they were poisonous; but an old sailor who had travelled in the east, once described to me a fruit which grew there and which he said procured a most delightful trance. I foolishly concluded it to be the solanum, which grew in our garden,—a treacherous, luscious-looking fruit; so the next day I went——"

"And plucked it directly," said Monsieur de Sainville.

"Oh! no," coldly replied Nathalie; "I took time to consider. I knew the fruit was poisonous; but then by not eating too much, I should be safe; in short," she added with a penitential sigh, "I did it."

"And what was the result?" asked Monsieur de Sainville.

"A week's thirst, dizziness and fever," answered Nathalie, with a half-rueful, half-comic look; "if I had only enjoyed my expected treat, I should not have cared much; but it was all suffering—no pleasure."

"But I hope you felt duly sorry," said the Canoness, very gravely.

"No; I was only disappointed."

"But, surely, Petite, you know it was very wrong."

"Wrong! why so? If I had not eaten the berries, then I should be longing for them to this day; whereas now all the berries in this world would not tempt me."

"A shrewd reasoning," remarked Monsieur de Sainville, "and one which, applied to graver matters, could not fail from introducing some new principle in ethics."

"Well, Petite," observed the Canoness, admonishingly, "you must not do so any more; do you hear?"

"Aunt," interrupted her nephew, with his peculiar smile, "you remonstrate in vain; Mademoiselle Montolieu has only had a taste of the apple, she will return to it yet."

Nathalie coloured very deeply, but it was not in her nature to be dismayed. She soon rallied, and replied, looking up: "Not to that apple, at least."

"Oh! then you do contemplate tasting some other."

"Perhaps so, I cannot tell." Nathalie spoke with apparent carelessness, but in spite of her usual daring, she felt annoyed and disturbed.

"Mademoiselle," continued her pitiless host, "you have forgotten the most interesting part of your story. How old where you when you ate the berries?"

Nathalie stooped to see if the fire, which was out, wanted arranging, and made no reply. Her face was crimson when she looked up again; as she did so she met the look of Monsieur de Sainville fastened on her with an expression that implied he still waited for her reply.

"It was some years ago," she said at length.

"I am sure she was a mere child," officiously observed the Canoness.

Monsieur de Sainville smiled.

"I suspect," he remarked, quietly, "that a mere child would not have thought of any such thing. Mademoiselle Montolieu had more probably reached the age for making experiments: thirteen or fourteen, I should say. Ah! I know it," he added, as Nathalie gave a slight start.

"Yes, it was about then," she rejoined, carelessly; but indifferent as she strove to appear, she now devoutly wished in her heart, that Eve's apple and Nathalie Montolieu's berries had never been mentioned that evening.

Nathalie laboured under an infirmity not uncommon to girls of buoyant spirits and little discretion or

experience; she did not know that there are a thousand innocent things that a woman, especially when young, is expected not to say, under pain of being thought vain, presuming, and even immodest. But that mixture of ease, self-possession, and propriety of bearing which the world requires of youth, is not natural to it: it is not even pleasing, because it is premature; the charm of the woman sits ill on the inexperienced girl: she has her own grace, which varies according to temperament, for, after all, it is only a question of temperament,—and she, who in very lightness of heart gives utterance to every passing thought, is not less pure in her daring, than she who, in her shyness, shrinks and blushes before every look. Nathalie was certainly not more vain than most handsome girls of her age; she was not less innocent in her southern vivacity of manner and freedom of speech, than the calm and reserved maidens of Normandy. At the same time, she might have subdued both, without any detriment to herself, and she probably would have done so, but for the harsh censure of Mademoiselle Dantin. The schoolmistress wished her to talk and laugh less, and broadly hinted at the impropriety of running up and down stairs with so much of the unnecessary liveliness displayed by Nathalie, who could scarcely go quietly across a room, or even move about, without seeming happier for the exertion. These ill-tempered remonstrances, joined to taunts of her southern origin, to which Made-

moiselle Dantin charitably attributed her various failings, only irritated Nathalie, and strengthened her firm resolve not to be improved: provincial patriotism, and the spirit of opposition both commanded resistance, and both were duly obeyed. But this rebellious spirit did not prevent Nathalie from having a certain fear of opinion—that tyrant of youth. Mademoiselle Dantin she did not mind: she knew her to be unjust, but she shrank from being thought bold or unfeminine by others; and it was the dread of this that made her feel somewhat anxious on this particular evening.

"What had she said?" was her internal soliloquy. "Was there much harm in it? Why in a sort of pique and wilful daring had she allowed herself to be led from one confession to another, until she had uttered so much Monsieur de Sainville had no business to hear? What was it to him, the berries she ate, the experiments she made, and the conclusions she drew? He, too, drew his own conclusions, evidently; all this mad talk would give him a delightful opinion of her: she bit her lip, and wished it had been her tongue. He looked rather grave; she was sure it was about her—he was thinking her a very forward, impertinent girl, and regretting that she had ever become his guest. Well, as to that, he need not trouble himself—she would go soon enough; for as to staying where she could not speak her mind freely, it was not to be thought of."

This haughty decision closed the reflections of Nathalie, who, like most proud and haughty persons, always kept by her a convenient stock of little imaginary quarrels. She now perceived that the room was silent; for since her last remark no one had spoken. She sat back on the couch, one arm supporting her cheek, her brow clouded, her eyes fixed on the floor, which her foot tapped with mingled impatience and irritation. Though Monsieur de Sainville had laid down the Revue, he did not think fit to speak. The Canoness knitted with her usual zeal; she occasionally looked up, as if thinking this silence awkward. She coughed, by way of opening the conversation; but this effort having failed, she relapsed into silence: her look, however, still sought her nephew, and wandering from him to Nathalie, rested at length on the young girl.

"*Mon Dieu!* how very strange," she exclaimed, in her sudden way, and laying down her knitting as she spoke; "I wonder I did not notice it before."

Both Nathalie and Monsieur de Sainville looked up.

"It is really extraordinary," she continued, "especially when one considers that there is no relationship. Do you think, Armand, the Montolieus were ever allied to the Sainvilles?"

"No," replied Monsieur de Sainville, with perfect gravity; "I do not think they were."

Nathalie coloured, and looked indignant; Aunt

Radegonde, without intending it, humbled her. She knew too well that Montolieu was not a name likely to be allied to one of the first names of the province; and being thoroughly democratic in feeling, whatever she might be in theory, she proudly resented all social and aristocratic distinctions.

"Did you notice it, Petite?" resumed the Canoness; "did you see it, Armand? That was why her face seemed so familiar to me."

"See what, aunt?"

"Why the striking likeness of Mademoiselle Montolieu to our aunt Adelaide's portrait."

Nathalie started slightly, but she never changed her attitude to look round. The likeness had not passed unheeded by her. She knew that, in mere beauty, at least, the Provençal girl and the once great lady could have stood side by side: sisters in loveliness and grace. A half-mocking, half-triumphant smile trembled on her lips, and for a moment lit up her changing features. Oh! youth and beauty, whilst your delightful power is felt—and when will it cease?—well may the happy ones who possess you, smile at the unavailing barriers erected by man's jealous pride. Reconciled to herself and restored to good humour, Nathalie looked up half-curiously, half-shyly to hear what Monsieur de Sainville would say. He scanned her features narrowly, then looked at the portrait, eyed her once again, and smiled.

"Yes," said he slowly, "there is a likeness."

There was nothing in the words beyond their plain meaning, but his look was indulgent and very kind; at least Nathalie thought so; she thought that as it rested on her, that look seemed to say: "My dear child, do not trouble yourself for any little heedless things you may have said: I shall not think the worse of you for an evening's nonsense. No doubt, you are eighteen; and may fancy yourself very wise; but, take my word for it, you are a child yet, and not much wiser than when you ate the berries."

Did he really mean this, or had she simply imagined it? Nathalie did not know, and felt puzzled. She consoled herself with the assurance, that it was a matter of no importance to her; that she really did not care. But though she repeated this to herself often enough, she did not lose the opportunity of ascertaining the truth which offered itself to her on the following day.

She had been taking a long walk with the Canoness in the garden, and before going in, they had sat down in a recess of the box-wood hedge. It was a fine evening, mild and hazy, as Nathalie sat by the Canoness on the old stone bench, still warm with the heat of the sun, which was slowly passing away from the garden. She abandoned herself with a vague pleasure to the dreamy charm of the hour. On their left, embosomed amongst its dark evergreens, arose the grey old château, but it looked gay and airy, not sombre, in the mellow light, which softened the hues

and outlines of everything on which it fell; on their right extended the second terrace, dark, lonely, and silent, save for the little fountain, which sent forth a low, plashing sound,—monotonous, yet soothing to the ear. Whilst listening to it, Nathalie reclined back in the seat, and watched the red sunlight gradually fading from the smooth lawn before her. Thence her glance wandered along the windings of one of the many paths around them, until it was arrested by a graceful statue of Diana, rising white and motionless in the cool green light of a distant recess. The fleet and stately huntress was represented in the act of seizing by its antlers a stag, overtaken in the chase. Whilst Nathalie gazed thoughtfully on this copy of a well-known antique, the evening breeze arose, and brought her from the neighbouring plantations the strong and penetrating odour of the pine-trees. Then, suddenly, the scene of a long-forgotten episode of her childhood recurred to her, and an involuntary smile flitted across her features.

"Petite," exclaimed the Canoness, "you are thinking of something pleasant or amusing; come, do not be selfish and keep it to yourself."

"Marraine," replied Nathalie, smiling again, and addressing her by the familiar appellation the Canoness had authorized, but which, in her pride, the young girl would not use before Monsieur de Sainville on the preceding evening; "Marraine, you will laugh, call me romantic, and chide."

"Never mind;—is it a second edition of the berries?"

"Almost; but first, tell me which of the heathen deities you prefer?"

"Really," candidly answered Aunt Radegonde, "I do not recollect ever thinking about them."

"What! not think of the nymphs, in their limpid streams and cool grottoes? Have you not one there sleeping for ever in her ivy couch? Not think of Flora, as fresh and pure as the first flowers of spring; of cheerful Pomona, with her basket ever full of ripe, sunny fruit; of green-haired Nereids, gliding along the glassy ocean; or magic Syrens, that haunt the rocks and depths of the sea, to lure away unwary mariners? And, above all, not think of Diana, that proud and virgin huntress of the deep woods of Greece? Oh! I have, as a child, thought of them all, of her especially; often,—ay, many a time; and this brings me to what you want to know. I could not help smiling awhile back, because, as I saw that distant statue, and as the wind rose, and the fragrance of the pine-trees came to us here, I remembered a summer morning I spent in a lonely wood a long time ago. I had intentionally strayed away there, instead of going to school. It was not a very vast or romantic wood, but I easily converted it into a dark and solitary Thracian forest, sacred to the goddess. Bow and arrows I had none, but I hunted a few brown squirrels, who gaily leaped from bough

to bough, and led me a weary chase. A little stream, a mere silver thread of water, ran through the wood; I sat down on its margin, and imagined it to be one of those deep fountains of icy chillness, near which Diana and her nymphs rested from the chase; at length, fairly overpowered with fatigue, I fell fast asleep, and thus I was found, brought home, scolded, and duly punished for my *escapade*, by the loss of all my holidays. This quite banished Diana and her life of solitary freedom from my thoughts, until just now, when the whole scene rose before me, as I looked at the statue, and I saw myself again a child in the wood, where, half-pleased, half-afraid, I started, and listened to every breeze which brought me, from some mysterious depths, the wild yet pleasing odour of the pine-tree."

Too indulgent to chide, and yet not quite able to sympathize with the romantic fancies of the Provençal girl, the Canoness coughed, and shook her head gently.

"Well," she said at length, "you were quite a child,—so there is not much harm in all this; besides, we are alone to-day, Petite."

Nathalie looked up, flushed, in a moment.

"Does that make any difference?" she asked, rather quickly.

But the Canoness had been meditating all day a homily on the young girl's *légèreté* and want of prudent reserve, and she was quite determined that

Nathalie should have the benefit of it now. It proved rather a tedious homily; but so gentle in spirit, and evidently so kindly meant, that Nathalie only smiled, and never dreamed of taking offence.

"You see, Petite," sententiously observed the Canoness, "there are certain secrets——"

"I have no secrets!" interrupted Nathalie.

"Oh! Petite."

"None, I assure you, and it is well for me; I labour, as you said just now, under an infirmity of speech; I cannot keep my tongue quiet when, as I feel,—alas! always too late,—I ought to do so. I do not like silence: it is unsociable, cheerless,—and if to talk be a sin——"

"It is a weakness, a feminine weakness, men say, —but never believe that, child; it is a vile calumny."

"I fear I am very weak, for I like it."

"How strange! I dislike talking."

"Alas! I do not," replied Nathalie, unable to repress an arch smile. "Not speak! why, there are times when I would sooner talk to the trees and bushes than remain silent. Knowing well this fatal indiscretion, I have made it a rule to have no secrets; there is really not one earthly thing I have to hide. May I not therefore talk without any other fear than that of annoying those who may chance to hear me?"

"Ay, Petite, and if we had been alone last evening;—there, you need not colour up so."

"But, madame," objected Nathalie, somewhat

proudly; "I do not think I said anything so very wrong, though I have no doubt it was indiscreet and foolish enough."

"True, Petite; but men have such peculiar ideas. In short, I feared you would injure yourself in the opinion of Monsieur de Sainville, who cannot have that deep insight into female character which I possess. So, to learn what he thought, as well as to remove any unpleasing impression, I spoke to him this morning."

She paused and looked at Nathalie; the young girl's colour came and went, her head drooped slightly on her bosom, her eyes were fixed upon the earth, and the dark fringe of her eye-lashes rested almost on her cheek; she had plucked a twig of boxwood from the hedge, and was now pulling it slowly to pieces, leaf by leaf: she looked like a child at fault, and whom a word can make either penitent or rebellious.

"Well," continued the Canoness, "I spoke very delicately, of course,—so delicately, that at first he could not make out what I meant. 'Oh!' he said, at length, 'you are talking of Mademoiselle—what is her other name besides Montolieu—Nathalie—ay, Mademoiselle Nathalie. Well, aunt, what of her?' 'Why, Armand, I only wanted to explain to you, that being so young, gay, and pretty—' 'pretty!' he interrupted, 'how do you know she is pretty? I looked at her last night, and she never kept the same face for five minutes at a time, and I think that her

temper is not unlike her face.' You see, Petite, how he noticed about the knitting. Well, I made the best of it, and said I knew by my own experience, how to drop one's stiches would provoke a saint, and so on. He heard me to the end, smiled, and said, 'Be easy, aunt, there is no harm in the poor child.' But though it is all right as yet, pray, Petite, be more prudent another time."

Nathalie did not answer, but her look was no longer fixed on the earth; she seemed little pleased, and more rebellious than penitent.

"And what do I care about Monsieur de Sainville, or his opinion of me?" said the silent but sufficiently expressive curl of her lip.

Aunt Radegonde perceived she had done more harm than good.

"Petite," she said, gravely, "I begin to think you are not easy to manage. I did not mean to tell you something; I see I must, to reconcile you to Armand, who meant well. What do you think he added, when he asked me how I knew that you were pretty?"

"Really, I cannot tell; something very flattering, no doubt. To have no harm in one comprises everything good, does it not?"

"Oh, no! He only said, 'She is more than pretty, aunt; she is charming.'"

Did the compliment soothe Nathalie's wounded pride? No trace of the feeling appeared, at least on her features.

"Why!" exclaimed the Canoness, somewhat surprised, "I thought you would feel flattered, Petite! Let me tell you that Armand is difficult to please, and that I have not heard him say so of any woman, since his return."

Still Nathalie did not reply. When she spoke at length, it was to say that the evening was very cool, and that she felt chilly.

Aunt Radegonde often declared that she had great experience and penetration, and, above all, that she understood girls thoroughly; but, on this occasion, both acquired knowledge and native genius were at fault; and, whether Nathalie was pleased or not, piqued or flattered, was more than she could discover.

CHAPTER XI.

A week had passed away. Madame Marceau—or to give her the name which, notwithstanding her brother's tacit disapprobation, she persisted in assuming—Madame Marceau de Sainville—had prolonged her visit at the château de Jussac, and, to Nathalie's great satisfaction, did not seem inclined to return in haste.

The autumn, which now began, was the finest that had for many years been known in Normandy, and that week was one of uninterrupted fair weather. The sun rose and set with unclouded splendour; the mornings were clear and sunny; the days warm and bright; the evenings gorgeous and magnificent. As Monsieur de Sainville was now never at home in the day-time, Nathalie wandered about the garden and the grounds with unlimited freedom, and with a sense of enjoyment not marred or disturbed by the prospect

of meeting her severe-looking host. In a few days, there was not a retired nook in the whole place that had not become as familiar to her as if she had been born and bred in Sainville. In the intoxication of her delightful freedom, she no longer read or worked; the autumn days were brief and few—she resolved to enjoy them to the utmost; she accordingly visited the solitary green-house in the morning, the cool retreat of the sleeping nymph at noon, and she lingered by the pebbly bank of the little river at evening-time, when deeper shadows fell on the dark yet transparent stream, and the red sunshine slowly passed away from the hills beyond.

Notwithstanding these long walks, Nathalie spent the greater portion of her time with the Canoness. They sat together in the lime-tree avenue, and had endless conversations, which Nathalie, however, never seemed to find tedious; indeed, she proved so excellent and attentive a listener, that she greatly flattered the simple Canoness, and quite won her heart. They met Monsieur de Sainville at dinner, and he generally came to spend two or three hours in his aunt's boudoir in the course of the evening. To Nathalie, he was always strictly polite; yet, whether for his own peculiar gratification, or for the more praiseworthy purpose of trying the young girl's temper and patience, he seldom failed to vex or provoke her in some way or other before they parted. She retired to her room greatly offended, woke up somewhat molli-

fied, and went down to breakfast on the following morning not exactly knowing how she ought to behave to Monsieur de Sainville. Without giving her time to reflect, he quietly settled the point, either by taking it as granted that nothing had occurred to disturb their mutual harmony, or by uttering some well-timed remark, which at once restored her to good humour. Nathalie thus learned practically, that if her host knew how to provoke feminine anger, he was not inexpert in the more difficult art of soothing it again. But though he succeeded in pacifying her, he could not remove the unfavourable impression thus produced—an impression which daily grew stronger in her mind against him. All that Rose could urge, failed in satisfying Nathalie that her host behaved well towards her.

On the day fixed for Madame Marceau's return, the two sisters were seated together in the dull salon of Madame Lavigne, and discussing this subject somewhat warmly.

"Is he impertinent?" asked Rose.

"No, certainly he is not."

"Is he patronizing?"

"No; he may be proud enough of his name, wealth and station; but it is only fair to acknowledge that he never shows it."

"Then what does he do?"

"He treats me like a child, Rose; which I consider a very unwarrantable freedom."

Her sister could not repress a smile.

"Are you not a child?" she said.

"A child! Rose; that is too bad. I see you are just like him; but no, for you talk sensibly to me; he never condescends to do so. He scarcely speaks, yet makes me say things at which I afterwards bite my tongue. The other evening, on going up to my room, I thought what a strange man he was, and what strange things he had said; but on examining the matter, I found his most original remark was, that *ennui* was the serpent which tempted Eve. Yet with his provoking way of looking, half-smiling and putting careless questions, he had made me utter one folly after another. I resolved to be on my guard; but it was of no use, for the very next evening I allowed myself to be again provoked into the utterance of I know not how many foolish and impertinent things."

"You could not remain silent?"

"Not when I had begun; it was like a broken string of beads—whilst you try to fasten it at one end the beads slip off at the other. What vexes me most in this is, that he notices me at all. I am no child; indeed, I could understand him very well if he would only condescend to treat me like a sensible person,—I shall get angry if you smile so, Rose,—but no, though he can talk admirably, as I perceived yesterday, when some visitors came, it is not worth while addressing a foolish girl of eighteen in that strain."

"Nathalie," said her sister, very gravely, "there is a thing I cannot understand: you complain of Monsieur de Sainville, and yet you confessed awhile ago, you were delighted at the prospect of spending the winter at the château."

"Why, Rose, it is very plain," replied Nathalie, colouring; "I do not care about Monsieur de Sainville; that is why."

Rose eyed her sister seriously.

"How thoughtless you are," she said; "if your pride has already suffered in that house, will it not suffer still more? I wish you could have spent the winter here with me."

"Heaven forbid!" quickly exclaimed Nathalie, who coloured immediately at the fervour with which she had spoken.

"Yes," said Rose, looking round her with a thoughtful look and a mournful smile; "yes, you are young, gay, and this is a very dreary place. Yet, Nathalie, there are greater misfortunes than a dull home, a dull sister, and a cross aunt; and though it is useless, I wish you were farther away from a world, and from persons a great deal too much above you for your happiness or your pride. How will you feel when you leave your present home for some school like Mademoiselle Dantin's?"

"Miserable, no doubt; but, Rose, why trouble my head about such things, when there is a winter, an

age, before me? Why, before the spring comes round something will have turned up."

"What?" asked Rose.

"Oh, never mind what! something good, of course. Why, Rose, I am eighteen,—a gay heiress just entered into possession——"

"Of what?"

"Of hope, dear Rose,—Hope, the fairest lady eye ever saw; and rich—ay, with castles beyond number. Tell me not I am poor and friendless! Why there is wealth before me I shall never live to spend, and a friend looks at me from every face I meet. How can you think to cast me down on this lovely morning? Look at that warm sunshine which makes even this dull hole bright; at that bright blue sky beyond; why, even the old grey church tower looks gay and airy to-day."

Rose said nothing.

"I told you," continued her sister, "that I was an heiress; I mistook, Rose;—heiress! pshaw! I am queen; this world is my realm, my reign has just begun, and every joy of mine empire shall come and do me homage. God bless them all with their kind looks and pleasant voices; and what a long, endless train they look, Rose."

"Her head has been turned by romances," said Rose, laying down her work.

Nathalie laughed, and shook her head with joyous grace.

"As if I read romances now!" she said gaily. "What! read fiction with truth itself before me! I should be a child indeed! No, no, Rose; I have a wonderful romance of my own:—each day I turn over a new page, and at the bottom of none do I yet see written the dark word,—FINIS."

"You are happy; but for how long?"

"For ever. Who speaks of the sorrows of life? Strange, I feel an inability to suffer. Let those mope and mourn who will. I say this world is a gay place, and the journey through, as pleasant a path as ever was trod."

"And the nettles and the briars?"

"Nettles and briars must be plucked to sting; and touch them I will not whilst there are pleasant wayside flowers to gather. Rose, sorrow is of our own seeking. Some may like a taste of the bitter cup, by way of change, but I do not yet feel cloyed of sweetness. Oh! when one knows how to set about it, this life is a joyful thing."

"And what is it when youth is passed?" asked Rose, sadly. But her sister only smiled a bright, sunny smile that would not be dismayed.

"It is no use, Rose," she gaily said; "it is no use; it is like talking of next spring's troubles. I suppose youth must fade; the more is the pity, but I have years of it before me yet, and I will hoard up mine as a miser hoards his gold. I feel as if I could remain young for ever; why then should I get old?

You will say others do; then I will be original, and strike out a path of my own. Oh! the glorious times of simple faith, when travellers set forth to find the fountain of youth! But they might have stayed at home, Rose; for to keep a young heart is the only secret, and the fountain flows freely for all."

"And I verily believe," replied Rose, smiling, in spite of all her efforts to keep grave, "that you will drink of that fountain for ever."

"I told you so; and just in the same way shall I be rich, by making all I behold mine in enjoyment. People possess, that they may enjoy. I enjoy at once, without giving myself the trouble of possessing. You may smile, Rose, but I assure you I am neither proud nor ambitious: the crumbs and mites that fall from my neighbour's table of happiness will do very well for me."

"You are a strange child," said Rose, again laying down her work to look more earnestly at her handsome sister, whose laughing eyes and animated colour made her look even more than usually handsome; "shrewd and wise," she continued, "even through all your folly and your foolish dreams."

"Do not touch my dreams," observed Nathalie, looking up quickly; "they have been my only consolation many a time. Oh! the hours I have spent in Mademoiselle Dantin's garden, under the old beech-tree, in the school, in my room, not reading novels, as you so sagely fancy, but dreaming—ay, to my heart's

content. Why, of the waking visions which haunted me then, I can still remember some with all the vividness of reality,—the imaginary spots, the dreary deserts, the wild adventures, the perils, escapes, and sudden joys of a deliverance thrill through me still; they come back to me even now with the dull school-room where they had birth: the low murmuring hum of the pupils conning over their lessons, and the quick pattering of the winter rain against the window-panes."

"And where was the use of all this?" asked Rose, very coldly.

"To make me happy for a few hours," composedly answered Nathalie, "which was more than anything around me could have done."

Rose moved restlessly on her chair, and gave her sister a dreary look; when she spoke, her tone was almost ironical.

"I suppose," she said, "you call this imagination?"

"You may call it so if you like, Rose; it was happiness to me."

She spoke gently, but Rose did not seem mollified.

"Ay, happiness as real as that of Almaschar."

Nathalie smiled wistfully.

"I love that story, Rose, and I believe every one loves it. We are all Almaschars in our way, and there lies the charm of the old Arabian tale."

"But will you tell me what remained to you of your imaginary happiness?" persisted Rose.

"Not a basket of broken glass, but pleasant remembrances," replied Nathalie, who seemed to take a perverse pleasure in teazing her sister.

"Oh! if you only knew how pleasant and easy it is, Rose; the school-garden was not very fine, but I could convert it into anything. Why, an old moss-grown wall has made me as pensive as the most time-honoured ruins; a group of aspens has been to me as a whole forest,—a rivulet as a mighty river. We want from nature but the first few primitive notes: in us lies the true melody with its endless variations. I remember an old château in Provence that was to me as a long poem. It stood on the lonely beach within view of the sea. It was very bare and dreary within—what mattered it to me? I hung the walls with soft damask and rarest tapestry. Divine statues looked down in silence from every niche, and imaginary pictures opened long vistas of beauty; clear skies, azure seas and wild woods,—everything was there. I filled the hall with the gayest campany, a glorious company, that was of every land and all ages, that I could summon or dismiss at will. Rose, do not frown, do not look so severe—indeed, our world is too narrow. What avails it that we are born and have our being, if we must be shut up within so limited a sphere? Why may we not see and know those we could love and venerate. Alas! those that might have been everything to us too often belonged to some other age—they were gone before we had

birth. Have you never felt cheated and betrayed out of your due, because that being remained perforce a stranger? Oh! affection should not be the creature of a day; the gates of death should not possess that mysterious power,—they should not be that awful barrier between the quick and the dead! Why is this, Rose? Are we such miserable creatures, so poor in heart, that there is only room for those around us, —for one little narrow circle!"

Her countenance, late so gay, was now grave, her look earnest and thoughtful, her face turned towards Rose, inquiringly; but her sister coldly answered:

"Your talk is too high-flown for me; I suppose you will fall in love with some dead hero, one day, and quarrel with Providence, because you cannot have him. I wish you would confine your speech and feelings to reality."

"Reality, reality!" impatiently exclaimed Nathalie; "why reality is but the dregs of the cup, Rose; imagination is the clear red wine."

"The bubbling foam would have been a more appropriate emblem," said Rose, rather ironically.

Nathalie tapped her foot impatiently.

"You may say what you like, Rose," she warmly exclaimed, "but take imagination from life, and nothing remains. Oh! reality is too cold and cheerless a dame for me. I once saw an old ruin in the sunshine: the moss, the ivy, the gay yellow wall-flower peeped from every cranny; a bird was lining

its nest in a hole, and green lizards, glittering like emeralds, came in and out and basked in the light: the sky was blue beyond, the sun shone very brightly. Rose, it was the gayest ruin you ever saw; just the sort of place that would give one lightness of heart, and a wish to sing. I passed by it a few days later: the sky was dark and dull—it had been raining. The wall-flowers were beaten about by the wind, the moss hung dripping against the old stones, the ivy clung to them like a dark pall,—bird, lizards, sunshine, all were gone,—reality was there alone. Now, Rose, if one can keep the sunshine of life for ever over that cold stony ruin, reality,—where is the harm?"

"Wait to see, until your first sorrow comes," said Rose, briefly.

"Rose, you are very unkind; you do all you can to depress me. I am endeavouring to show you some other way to happiness, besides that which lies through the miserably dull route you call reality. This room, I suppose, is reality; Mademoiselle Dantin's horrid school-room was reality; but I tell you that my world is far more real, because it is far more beautiful. We need not see beauty to enjoy it, Rose; it is inward. A sunbeam, a sound, a word, a breath, awaken or create all that need be the soul's desire. I have had all sunny Italy in the deep blue sky of noonday; the plaintive murmur of the wind in the branches of a lonely pine has given me the dreary forests of the north, with their gigantic trees rising,

dark and spectre-like, through the thick flakes of falling snow, as I once read of them in some old book of travels; a whole pastoral landscape, with valley, low hills, quiet homesteads, and homeward-going cattle, has risen before me, with the scent of the new-made hay at evening. Why the other morning, the low ripple of the little stream that runs at the bottom of the garden, brought me back the deep and hollow murmur of the sea, with its endless waves still breaking on the beach."

"Do you often go on in that way at the château?" inquired Rose.

"No, Rose; for I do not often feel as I feel to-day."

"Yes, I can see something has pleased you, and so you behold all *couleur de rose:* what is it?"

"I give you my word I do not know, Rose. But you are right; something must have pleased me; for, indeed, as you say, everything wears a most rosy hue. There surely never was so lovely an autumn morning: the air is soft, yet exquisitely transparent; the breeze is genial as a breeze of spring; that deep blue sky would almost do for Provence. Oh! Rose, I feel very religious to-day; blessed be He who has given us all this life and joy!"

The window was open; Nathalie half-leaned out, her elbow resting on the window-sill, her cheek supported by the palm of her hand. The soft morning breeze played around her, and fanned her cheeks, whose

deepened bloom bespoke some inward emotion; her eyes shone brightly, but with deep softness in all their fire; her lips were slightly parted, and her breath came fast. Rose thought that as she raised her hand to arrange her hair, it trembled slightly. She looked excited, but it was the excitement which soon subsides into languor. Her sister eyed her again, and, familiar as it was to her, she now wondered at the young girl's beauty.

"*Mon Dieu!* what is the matter with you to-day?" she slowly asked.

Nathalie only smiled.

"Has anything made you feel glad?"

"Nothing, that I know of. Is it a wonder that I should be gay? Then here comes one who will do all she can to check the mood."

The door opened as she spoke, and Madame Lavigne entered, supported by Désirée, who left immediately.

"Who was that talking?" sharply asked the blind woman, when Rose had helped her to her seat.

"Guess?" replied Nathalie.

"Oh! you. Your voice sounds cheerful to-day. What has pleased you?"

"Nothing, and there is the beauty of it. To be gay with good reason is no wonder; but what joy so sweet as a nameless joy,—unless it be a nameless hope?"

The blind woman smiled her own sour smile.

"So you feel glad?" she said.

"So glad that you cannot put me out of temper."

"We shall see. How is the best friend?"

"Very well."

"Kind still?"

"Very kind."

"Have you quarrelled yet?"

"Quarrelled! No."

"Then he is very foolish."

Nathalie looked annoyed, but she scorned to reply.

"There!" triumphantly cried Madame Lavigne, "you are already vexed."

"No, I am not."

"Yes, you are; and, poor child! well you may be. What! have you been a whole fortnight in his house, and has he not given you an opportunity of showing your temper? Mademoiselle Dantin knew your worth better than that. I know you better than that: we quarrel every time we meet, for you are nothing, unless when you are teazed."

"And how do you know I have not been teazed?" quickly asked Nathalie.

"I knew I could make you confess it," said Madame Lavigne, maliciously.

"I have confessed nothing," cried Nathalie, colouring.

"Yes, you have," replied the blind woman, smiling bitterly; "your vanity could not resist the bait I laid out for it. Oh! I know girls, and their ways. But

come, child, do not be too vain, because he notices you a little; you amuse him just now, but when the novelty is worn off, why your best friend will not seem to know you are in the house."

"You cannot tell," said Nathalie, a little scornfully.

"Yes, I can; do I not know how these things go on? Why, child, do not be foolish; do not forget you are only his aunt's companion, after all."

As her aunt uttered this taunt, Rose looked at her sister. She could detect an expression of pain and wounded pride passing over the features of Nathalie, but it did not last; and when she spoke, her tone was composed and cool.

"Madame," she said, "you quite mistake Monsieur de Sainville; he is not capricious or selfish, as you seem to think—as such conduct would imply; he treats me, not as his aunt's companion, but as his guest."

"Capricious or selfish!" said Madame Lavigne. "Ah! I understand—a hint about Rose. So your best friend is not that. And what is your best friend like, child? Have you any objection to describe him to me?"

"None," unhesitatingly replied Nathalie. "He is good, just, and, though cold, kind. You now know him as well as I do."

"I do not like perfect characters," snappishly answered Madame Lavigne.

She looked sour and displeased, and refused to answer, save by a cool nod, to the cheerful adieu of Nathalie, who was now preparing to depart.

The young girl was turning towards the door, when it opened, and admitted no less a personage than Mademoiselle Dantin, accompanied by the Chevalier. Nathalie started, coloured, and then, in spite of all her efforts, could scarcely keep grave. The schoolmistress closed the door, and eyed her former teacher with haughty majesty; the Chevalier looked both distressed and pleased; Rose remained calm; Madame Lavigne turned her head about, listened keenly, though not a word was spoken, and appeared to be conscious that something agreeable to her was at hand.

"What!" she exclaimed, rubbing her hands, "it is that good, that kind Mademoiselle Dantin come to pay us a visit; and the dear Chevalier, too. My dear little Nathalie, I hope you are not gone. Where are you, mignonne? Here is Mademoiselle Dantin, whom you are so fond of."

Mademoiselle Dantin coughed a short indignant cough, and looked daggers, first at her sightless friend, then at the Chevalier, who had respectfully approached the young girl. A smile trembled on Nathalie's lip; she tried to repress it, but in vain—the smile broke forth. Willing to make the best of an awkward position, she turned towards the schoolmistress, and said, frankly:

"Is there any reason why we should not be friends?"

Mademoiselle Dantin shot an angry glance at the Chevalier, then closed her eyes and gently inclined her head towards her left shoulder.

"Friends! she was in a state of friendship with the whole human race."

"I am willing to believe it," said Nathalie, a little impatiently; "though we did not part exactly as friends part. I believe, however, that you laboured under an honest mistake. If you were severe, I was, to say the least, impatient; but surely this is no reason for mutual and very unavailing enmity."

"Enmity, Mademoiselle Montolieu!" exclaimed the schoolmistress, casting around her a look of astonishment; "I protest against the word; it is unnatural in this part of the country, though I have no doubt that in the unhappy south it is, alas! frequent enough."

The eyes of Nathalie lit up indignantly.

"You are unchanged," she said; "but you are right, quite right;—yes, in the south we hear of enmity,—but it is a breath, a word; here it is unspoken, to lie hidden in the heart."

Madame Lavigne laughed, and rubbed her hands with malicious glee.

"Fine day!" she said; "rather hot in this room, too! Will Mademoiselle Dantin and Mademoiselle Montolieu both stay and dine with a poor invalid?"

"Stay!" indignantly cried Nathalie; "stay in this room; no—not one second longer."

The Chevalier vainly began a speech about amiable ladies and the gentleness of the sex. The schoolmistress gave him a scornful glance; Nathalie had turned away, and the door had flown open and again closed upon her. She had reached the door below, and was vainly endeavouring to unlock it, when a hand arrested her. She turned round; it was Rose, looking grave and severe.

"Come in here," said she, pointing to a small and gloomy parlour, of which the door stood half-open. Nathalie complied, docile and subdued in an instant.

"Well, Rose," she hesitatingly said, "I know you are not pleased; but could I help it? Surely it was spiteful of her to speak so about the south."

"That was no reason why you should give way to your temper."

"But, Rose, I cannot bear it. Do you think," she added, whilst the pride of race deepened the colour on her cheek, "do you think I have forgotten that these litigious Normans are descended from the savage barbarians of the north, whilst we are the children of Greece and Rome?"

"Try and speak sensibly, child," said Rose, shrugging her shoulders; "and pray remember that your sister is a genuine and cool Normande."

"You, Rose," exclaimed Nathalie, whilst her eyes glistened; "Oh! you are of those that belong to no

race and no clime: you are a saint,--an angel upon earth."

"Angel as I am," decisively said Rose, "I am going to scold you."

"Scold! Rose; I will hear you patiently. Be just, and acknowledge that I have never yet quarrelled with you, or what you said."

"No, my poor child," replied Rose, who seemed a little moved, "and yet I have been severe; you are right: you have been patient."

"Because I love, I revere you, Rose," cried Nathalie eagerly, and pressing her sister's hands as she spoke; "when I love I can be patient, I can endure; but from such beings as Mademoiselle Dantin, or your cross old aunt,—never."

"Ay, and nothing would content you this morning but to teaze my aunt."

"I merely refused to gratify her ill-nature, by speaking ill of Monsieur de Sainville."

"Do you think of him all you said?" gravely asked Rose.

The two sisters still stood in the little parlour, Nathalie with her back to the narrow window, whence a pale light descended on the calm features of Rose, who detected, nevertheless, the deepening colour on her sister's cheek.

"If I say that I spoke so for the praiseworthy purpose of vexing your aunt, you will look grave, Rose, will you not?" she at length replied.

Rose did look very grave.

"I do not understand this trifling, Nathalie; indeed I do not," she said, very seriously. "Oh! if you would only promise me to be prudent!"

"Ask something I can promise, Rose; that is impossible, for it is not in my nature to fear; and prudence is only fear, with a wise cloak on."

"Then promise me to remember a very wise thing you said up-stairs."

"A wise thing! Did you say a wise thing, Rose? Oh! for the wonder of having said a wise thing, I will promise anything. What was it?"

"That sorrow was of our own seeking," gravely answered her sister.

"Did I really say that?" inquired Nathalie, looking a little thoughtful; "and was that a wise thing?"

"A true one, at least."

"Well, then, Rose, I shall keep to this wisdom, and dutifully avoid all sorrow. I suppose this is your meaning—the best means of accomplishing which is to take all the happiness this world of ours can afford me."

Rose shook her head, and sighed.

"Rose," said her sister, "you are devout, but verily I have more faith than you have. I believe in happiness, little as I have known of it; I believe in it with my whole soul—ay, with my whole heart," she added, pressing both her hands to her bosom.

"And I also believe in happiness," answered Rose, in a low tone; "but oh! sister, not in the vain, dreary happiness of this world."

She, too, had clasped her hands, but as they are clasped in prayer. When her look met that of her sister, it implied fervent faith—the faith of all that the soul can hope of joy hereafter; even as in the clear look of the younger girl might be read the delightful hopes and divine promises which the earthly future still holds out to the ardent and impassioned soul of youth.

As Rose gazed on that radiant face, she felt, perhaps, how unavailing it was to pour forth the fears and doubts of her maturer years into the ear of a being still so rich in the wealth of her golden youth. She sighed, but spoke no more, and merely laid her thin hand on the young girl's shoulder, and pressed her pale lips on her clear brow in token of adieu.

They parted. As she turned the angle of the court, Nathalie looked round, and smiled again at her grave sister, who, after lingering awhile on the threshold, was silently closing on herself the door of her gloomy home.

CHAPTER XII.

On entering the drawing-room, Nathalie, who had expected to find only the Canoness, was somewhat disconcerted to perceive Madame Marceau, and a lady, in whom she recognized Madame de Jussac. After a moment of hesitation she came forward, for, though their presence was anything but agreeable to her, pride would not allow her to draw back or look disconcerted.

Madame Marceau held out her hand with smiling welcome, and protested that Mademoiselle Montolieu looked charmingly. This was addressed to the lady by her side, who, by acquiescing, showed that she knew who Mademoiselle Montolieu was; they had

met at Mademoiselle Dantin's school, where, with little regard to the ceremonial of rank or wealth, Madame de Jussac had once left her daughters during a temporary absence at Paris.

Madame de Jussac was a fair and aristocratic lady of middle age. She had been handsome, and was handsome still,—but of a pale and tranquil sort of beauty, that contrasted strikingly with the dark and anxious face of her friend. She seldom spoke, yet no one thought her silent. When Madame Marceau addressed her, she answered with a gentle inclination of the head, a quiet smile that displayed her ivory teeth, or a slow look of her soft blue eyes, and all this was quite as significant as the other lady's full and stately speech. She seemed as averse to unnecessary motion as to superfluous discourse; once she had fairly settled herself on a couch or sofa, she did not care to leave it, but reclined there for hours, in an attitude of repose that was not without a certain indolent grace. Her chief occupation seemed to be to fan herself slowly during the heat of the day. This first day of her sojourn at Sainville—for she had come to stay a week—appeared very dull to Nathalie. Aunt Radegonde had retired to her room with a bad headache, and the young girl kept as much as possible out

of the way of the two ladies. After dinner, which was unusually early, and at which Monsieur de Sainville, being away, did not appear, Nathalie retired to the deep recess of one of the drawing-room windows, and sat there alone, shrouded from observation by the crimson curtain. The ladies spoke in a subdued tone; but even had their discourse been louder, Nathalie would not have heeded it. She worked at her embroidery, and occasionally put it down to watch the darkening and stormy-looking sky. When the sun set in the west, a sudden and lurid light spread over the whole landscape, and threw its flame-like glow over the sere foliage of the avenue, and the road and landscape beyond. It was at this moment that the door opened, and Amanda entered. At first Nathalie paid no attention to what she said; but she suddenly became attentive; it was Madame Marceau who was speaking.

"Who could have thought our quiet little river would ever act so?" she said, in a tone of calm concern. "An inundation! I am truly sorry for those poor people. Will they lose all their crops? But what has Monsieur de Sainville to do with this, Amanda?"

"He is in the boat, madame."

"In the boat!" exclaimed Madame Marceau, with sudden alarm. "Good heavens! what has he to do with the boat! Surely those people could save their crops without Monsieur de Sainville risking his life!"

"I believe I may assure madame, there is no danger whatever. But the place is so lonely that there was only one man at home; the rest were out far away in the fields; and Monsieur de Sainville, perceiving there was no time to lose, very kindly offered his aid."

"I am astonished!" impatiently said Madame Marceau; "surely, my brother might have made their loss good to those people: a few stacks of corn can never be worth all the trouble he is taking. Is it far up the river? Can we see anything from the end of the garden, I wonder? *Ma bonne*, shall we go and try to look on?"

Madame de Jussac languidly assented. There was a rustling sound of silken robes; then a door closed softly, and all was still. Nathalie emerged from her retreat. Amanda, who had lingered behind the two ladies, uttered a faint scream.

"I beg mademoiselle's pardon," she said, recovering at once, "but I did not know mademoiselle was

there; and when she came out, looking so pale and frightened——"

"What is it? Are you sure there is no danger? What is Monsieur de Sainville doing in that boat? How did all this happen?"

The young girl spoke in a brief, almost imperative tone. Amanda eyed her with slight surprise, but composedly replied that the river had suddenly overflowed its banks at some distance up the stream, and carried away the stacks of corn belonging to the poor cottagers who lived by the river-side. Monsieur de Sainville was riding by at the time of the accident; perceiving the necessity of prompt assistance he had immediately dismounted and offered his aid.

"And how do you know this?" asked Nathalie.

"I met a woman who was going to Sainville to fetch assistance, and send up another boat."

"A nice messenger! To lose her time in telling you all this, instead of going on at once," impatiently exclaimed the young girl.

She took her scarf, lying on a chair, as she spoke, and quickly went down to the garden.

She found Madame Marceau and her friend standing by the water-side, at the end of the third terrace. She drew near. A bend in the river allowed the eye

to look up the stream for a considerable distance. It was the opposite bank, which was much lower than that on which the château stood, that had suffered. The fields, which Nathalie had seen that very morning fresh and green, were now covered with a rolling sheet of dark and heavy water, over which lowered a leaden and sullen-looking sky; in the distance she perceived a few dark spots rising above the stream,—these were stacks of corn. Her heart ached, as she remembered how, a few days before, she had spent a whole afternoon, sitting in the high grass, at the foot of a tree, watching the reapers 'midst the yellow corn, and listening to their far and joyous singing. A black speck appeared in the distance—it was the boat crossing over to the submerged bank; in the taller of the two rowers, Nathalie thought she could recognize Monsieur de Sainville; she felt sure that it was he, when he rose for a moment, and the outline of his figure appeared dark and distinct on the grey sky. The boat approached the nearest stack—then there was a pause, which seemed to Nathalie as if it would never end; at last the boat moved once more, but it moved slowly, for it was heavily laden; once, in the very middle of the stream, it stood quite still, and the water looked so dark and threatening, as it rushed by,

its swollen tide crested with a thin white foam, that Nathalie turned pale, and felt as if her heart ceased to beat; but the rowers were only pausing for rest—the boat soon moved again;—in a few minutes, it had safely reached the shore.

Nathalie gave a sigh of relief, and looked at Madame Marceau, who stood watching all, through her opera-glass. She lowered it, and said, very calmly:

"A similar thing occurred last year, I believe. Those people might really have been more careful. Armand is so prudent and courageous, that I do not fear for him; I have besides been given to understand that the water never rises above a certain height."

"Indeed!" said Madame de Jussac, with a slight yawn, and looking as if she longed to be back again on the easy drawing-room sofa.

Nathalie beheld with astonishment their well-bred ease and indifference. Anything resembling a deed to do, an adventure to accomplish, a peril to brave, even though she could only be a passive looker-on, sent the blood to her heart in a more rapid tide, and made her whole frame thrill with excitement. The cries and lamentations of the women and children,

which the wind brought down distinctly to her ear; the sight of that frail boat gliding over the heaving and swollen river; of the dark sky above, heavy with threatening clouds; of the corn, now loosened from the stacks, and carried down by the rapid stream; the thought of the impending ruin of so many families, of the risk run to save their little property, of the courage displayed in thus seeking danger, and holding life so cheap, when there was an aim in view, so moved and roused her, that she could not refrain from clapping her hands when a boat from Sainville, with eager and bending rowers, cheering as they went, shot past, like an arrow, on its way to the scene of destruction.

"How cool it is!" said Madame de Jussac, with a slight shiver.

"I think we shall have a storm, too," observed Madame Marceau.

And, with mutual and tacit consent, the two ladies turned homewards. Nathalie never perceived their departure. She stood on the very brink of the water, half-bending forward, her hand shading her eyes, her look eagerly following the boat, which soon joined the other.

The task now proceeded rapidly. The two boats

rivalled in promptitude and zeal; they crossed and recrossed the water, now heavily laden, now light and empty. At length there came a lull; all that could be rescued of the corn seemed to be stowed in safety; the waters over the flooded fields flowed in a dark and even tide, with here and there a wandering sheaf, tossed by an eddy of the stream. One of the boats remained, to save all that still floated on the surface; the other slowly came down the stream, towards the spot where Nathalie stood, watching its progress. It neared the bank; stopped by a convenient landing-place; Monsieur de Sainville leaped out; thanked the man, who touched his cap, and rowed back to the spot whence he had come.

As her host evidently did not see her, it would have been more proper and discreet for Nathalie to retire than to remain. But she was inquisitive and *naïve* in her curiosity, like a true southern, and therefore stayed until Monsieur de Sainville came up to her. He could not repress a slight exclamation of wonder on seeing her there, standing by the water's edge, with her light dress fluttering in the wind, and her anxious face eagerly turned towards him. She mistook his brief ejaculation for one of pain, and, stepping forward, said quickly:

"Are you hurt, sir?"

"Hurt! No," he replied, with increased surprise; and his scrutinizing look said, "What are you doing here?"

She did not heed it; but continued:

"Is the corn all safe, sir?"

"Almost all."

"And was there no accident?"

"None whatever."

"But how tired you must feel!"

"No, thank you," he quietly replied. "I was formerly fond of rowing, and have not lost the habit yet."

"But this was a very dangerous task, was it not?" continued Nathalie.

"Not in the least," he answered, with a smile. "But allow me to say, you did wrong to linger here on this dark evening."

Nathalie looked round; she saw that the two ladies, whom she had quite forgotten, were gone. Behind and around her stretched a gloomy and threatening sky, which seemed more gloomy still, as it lay reflected, with its mass of clouds, in the dark and sullen waters of the swollen river. She turned quietly towards Monsieur de Sainville, and said simply:

"I never heard them going."

"Then my sister and Madame de Jussac were here. Why did you remain behind? Did you not see the storm coming fast?"

"No; I was looking at the boats, and never thought of the sky."

"Nor of the rain," said he, looking down at the large drops which had already stained the stone steps on which they stood; for they had turned homewards whilst speaking thus, and were going up to the second terrace.

"Do you think it will thunder?" asked Nathalie, who preceded him, and now turned round with sudden alarm.

Before he could reply, a flash of lightning crossed the sky behind her; she only saw it by the lurid light which passed over the grave features of Monsieur de Sainville; but she turned very pale, and trembled from head to foot, when the peal of thunder followed in rapid succession.

"You are afraid of thunder," he said, with some surprise.

"Very much," she replied; and her pale lips and chattering teeth showed there was no affectation in the fear.

He gave a quick look around him; the rain was falling fast: the sky was deepening in gloom.

"It is useless to think of reaching the house," he decisively observed; "will you have the goodness to come this way?"

He went down the steps as he spoke; the stone was already wet and slippery. He held out his hand to her; she took it, and followed him with silent docility: but when she saw him entering the grounds, she could not help saying,

"Where are we going, sir?"

"To the pavilion," he quietly replied.

This pavilion was only a little rotunda, or summer-house of rustic work. The roof was thatched, and the walls were made of young larch-trees, with the bark on. It stood in a lonely spot, surrounded by large and wide-spreading beeches. Aunt Radegonde had one day pointed it out to Nathalie as "Armand's favourite retreat; "he comes there for several hours every day to smoke," she said; "for he is kind and considerate, and knows how I hate the smell of either pipe or cigar about the house." The rain poured down in torrents; this was no time to remonstrate or object: Nathalie did neither, but walked quickly

with Monsieur de Sainville along a shady and covered path. In a few minutes they had reached the place; he raised the latch, she entered, he followed her in, and closed the door behind him. Scarcely were they within, when the storm burst forth in all its fury; flash followed flash, and peal was heard upon peal. Nathalie hid her face in her hands, and now and then looked up with a frightened start; whilst Monsieur de Sainville calmly assured her that there was little or no danger, that the storm was not so nigh as she thought, and that the lightning was much more likely to be attracted by some of the tall trees, than by their little thatched refuge. The young girl endeavoured to seem attentive, but she evidently heeded more the thunder than his arguments; and at length, he could not help asking her again, how she had remained behind, being so much afraid of the storm as she was.

"Because I never thought about it," she quietly replied.

As the storm lessened, Nathalie, feeling somewhat ashamed of her timidity, assumed a composed air, and glanced around her with a look half-shy and half-curious. The retreat of Monsieur de Sainville was not encumbered with needless furniture, for

there were only two chairs, a small buffet, and a round table fixed in the centre of the room, all of rustic work. At one end of the room stood a low chimney, framed in iron; over it were suspended large pipes of peculiar shape, and a gleaming blade half-drawn from its scabbard. Facing the chimney was a little arched window, opening a gloomy vista into winding alleys, close thickets, and groups of bushes of the melancholy-looking pine-tree now seen through a veil of white and heavy rain, and by the pale light of rapid lightning flashes.

Nathalie felt her heart beating with something between pleasure and fear. As she listened to the vague and moaning sounds of the storm without, and looked on that wild prospect, half-wrapped in mysterious gloom, she fancied herself a belated traveller, lost in some primeval forest solitude. Monsieur de Sainville fell into her mood, by observing:

"Mademoiselle Nathalie, I hope you like my hermitage. Pray please your romantic fancy for me; imagine me the sober hermit, yourself the damsel of old, reaching this solitary refuge, after many perilous wanderings. You must be wet and cold,—will you not warm yourself, whilst I produce my hermit's fare?"

She turned round; a wood fire was kindling on the

hearth with a crackling sound: he drew a chair for her. She sat down by the fire, for she felt chilly; in the meanwhile he opened the buffet, and drew forth a glass, a flask of wine, and a small wheaten loaf, all of which he placed on the table before her.

"Real hermit's fare," he said; "though I rather suspect hermits drank water; but not happening to have a limpid stream—are not those the words?—running past my door, I must needs be content with wine, and have nothing better to offer to an unprotected guest."

He poured out some wine as he spoke; she thanked him, but did not touch it; she was bending over the fire, and looked cold and pale; he eyed her uneasily, said she would certainly take cold, and urged her to throw off her wet scarf and dry her feet. There was something of kindly imperativeness in his manner; she complied, with silent docility, and took off both scarf and slippers. Her host helped her to shake the first; then, as she knelt on the hearth, and held it to the fire, he took up one of her slippers and also held it close to the heat, so that it might dry more quickly. Nathalie looked at him in silent wonder. "*Mon Dieu!*" she thought, "what would Madame Marceau say, if she could see her brother drying my slippers?"

In her simplicity, the young girl thought that she had wronged Monsieur de Sainville—that he was not so proud as she had once imagined him to be. In reality, he was much more so. Besides the personal pride she had justly attributed to him, her host had the pride of his race and birth in the highest degree. He was proud of his station, to which he never alluded—of his ancestors, whom he had too much good taste ever to mention—of all, in short, that had made him Armand de Sainville. But the pride of the old French noblesse has always gone hand in hand with a chivalrous courtesy of manner that distinguishes them still. Nathalie need have felt no surprise on seeing her host thus philosophically attending on her; he belonged to that race of *gentilhommes* whose most aristocratic monarch, Louis XIV, bared his head and bowed low to the poorest peasant girl who ever crossed his path.

Whilst drying the young girl's *pantoufle*, Monsieur de Sainville eyed it somewhat curiously. Nathalie, like a true Frenchwoman, though simple to an excess in her dress, was very fastidious about her *chaussure*. The slipper which he held was merely of black satin, but so small, so quaintly cut, and so coquettish, that, though not made of glass, it might have rivalled the

famous *pantoufle* of Cinderella. He could not repress a smile, as he looked at it, and turned it round on his hand, like some childish thing. With good-humoured reproof, he asked Nathalie if she seriously thought such flimsy little things could be of any possible use? She looked rather indignant, on hearing her favourite slippers thus maligned, and quickly replied, that, though so slight, they were very good and very strong; upon which, he shook his head, and looked sceptical.

The scarf soon dried, and so did the slippers; Nathalie quietly put them on, unseen, as she thought, by Monsieur de Sainville, who stood at one angle of the fire-place, looking down abstractedly at the burning embers on the hearth. As she rose, her hair, heavy with rain, fell down in dishevelled tresses; she was impatiently fastening it up again, damp as it was, when he quietly observed:

"Do let your hair dry, Mademoiselle Nathalie; it is quite wet."

"He sees everything," pettishly thought the young girl; but she silently complied, and once more knelt down facing him. He seemed abstracted; she wondered what he could be thinking about and in wondering looked; the result of which was that he

immediately caught her eye, and seeing her slightly confused, asked which of the pipes had attracted her attention.

"This is a very peculiar-looking one," evasively replied Nathalie, too frank to like or freely accept an excuse.

"This is not a pipe," said he taking it down as he spoke, "but a pistol."

She started up in alarm; he smiled and assured her there was no danger; but Nathalie looked sceptical and uneasy; she had a vague suspicion that pistols were always loaded, and always on the point of going off. Ashamed of the fear she had betrayed, she knelt once more, but could not help thinking that Monsieur de Sainville must be a strange suspicious man, to have those deadly weapons around him even in that quiet summer-house.

"It is a travelling habit I have taken," he calmly said; "I assure you it gives a peculiar sense of security and independence. With just that little instrument in my hand"—he handled it as he spoke—"though not half so formidable looking as yonder pipe, it will go hard indeed if I do not remain my own master. The law is a good thing; the police is useful, watchful servants are beyond praise, but that

which enables a man to do without them all is better far."

He replaced the pistol as he spoke; then perceiving Nathalie's glass still full, he urged her to take some of the wine he had poured out for her.

"You will like it," he quietly observed.

She raised the glass to her lips, then quickly laid it down and looked at her host; he was smiling and seemed to enjoy her surprise.

"But this is a Provençal wine," she said with some emotion; "the ciotat muscat, which I never tasted since I came to Normandy."

"Yes, it is the ciotat; I had some at Arles, and liked it so well that I ordered a certain quantity of it when I came here."

"Arles! You have been at Arles?" exclaimed the young girl eagerly looking at him, and eyeing him from head to foot, as if the mere fact of having been at Arles must have produced some change in his person.

"Yes, indeed, I have; I was coming from Beaucaire."

"Beaucaire!" she interrupted. "You have been at Beaucaire, also? Did you see the great fair?"

"I went there for that purpose, four years ago."

"*Mon Dieu!* that was the very time I went with my poor aunt. How strange we did not meet?"

"Yes," he said, very seriously; "it is peculiar."

"Was it not a fine fair? How gay the narrow streets looked with the signs of blue, red, and yellow cloth crossing from one side to the other, and the white linen awning over all! And then the rich goods displayed at every door! Carpets, costly arms, rich silks, and jewels in heaps,—yes, everything was there. My aunt told me some of the merchants had travelled hundreds of miles to exhibit and sell their goods. I believe they were of every nation under the sun. I saw Italians, Spaniards, and Germans, too, amongst the Europeans; but I looked most at the Turks, who seemed so solemn; the Armenians, who had such wily faces; and the Greeks, who were so handsome! Did you see them? My aunt said it was the finest fair that had ever been at Beaucaire; and though we only came for a few days we remained the whole of the first week."

"So did I," said Monsieur de Sainville.

"Then I am quite sure we must have met," exclaimed Nathalie, looking delighted; "of course, we did not know one another,—I was much shorter than I am now,—but still we met at that fair of Beaucaire."

She spoke as if they were old acquaintances, and, indeed, nothing now could have convinced her that they were not so. She had spent a week at Beaucaire, four years ago, so had he;—the town was small, her walks had been confined to the principal streets, so must his have been;—it was evident they had met,—and if they had met, how could they be strangers? From that hour the date of their acquaintanceship retrograded four years. He adopted the same logical reasoning, for he said with a smile,—

"We certainly did meet; indeed, I seem to recollect noticing a young girl, of fourteen or so, on the boat that took me to Arles; and she was decidedly like you," he added, looking at her fixedly.

"Was she with an old lady?" demurely asked Nathalie.

"Precisely,—with an old lady."

"And had she white muslin on?"

"I really think she had."

"How strange!" said Nathalie, seeming much amused.

"I see nothing strange in it," he replied, quite gravely; "we were at the fair together, and went home by the same boat,—it was perfectly natural."

"Yes, it would be, if it did not so happen that

I never went home by the boat at all;" replied Nathalie, looking very merry and mischievous.

Monsieur de Sainville looked slightly disconcerted. He was a grave man, unacquainted with girls; he had certainly never expected that any young girl would carry her audacity so far as to make game of him to his very face. He frowned slightly, and looked down at her with a displeased mien,—but though her colour rose a little, her look still fearlessly met his. He could not help smiling, and saying in a good-humoured tone, that he must have been deceived by a casual likeness.

"How did you like Beaucaire, sir?" Nathalie hastened to ask; for she was not quite sure she had not gone too far, and wished to change the subject.

"Not half so well as Arles."

"Then you liked Arles?" she exclaimed, looking at him a little wistfully, whilst something tremulous was in her tone as she uttered the name of her native and much-loved city.

"Who would not like that venerable old place, with its mighty ruins, some of them so fresh that it seems as if the Romans had left them but yesterday! With its women, whose strange beauty is like to none other; for they have a charm between eastern

fire and classic grace, and when they seem most calm there is still something of southern passion in their look and in their mien."

Oh! subtle and exquisite indeed is the flattery of the land and race we love! Nathalie felt its power in the deepest recesses of her heart. Even as Monsieur de Sainville spoke, a bright vision slowly rose before her on the dark wall of the little hermitage: she beheld the broad Rhone gliding swiftly at the foot of a dark and ancient city, crowned with Roman ruins, and rising in the warm sunlight against the deep blue southern sky. She beheld it, and looked until her eyes became dimmed with tears. Then the vision faded away; she saw once more the dark night without; within, the fire-lit hermitage, and Monsieur de Sainville standing before her and looking down at her very kindly.

"I have grieved you," he said.

"Oh! no, sir. You have made me feel so happy! Not since I left Arles have I met any one who had seen it, or cared to hear about it."

"Poor child!" he compassionately said; "the change must have been great indeed, from Provence to Normandy."

"The home sickness was on me for a whole year.

I could not sleep, and scarcely eat. The doctor said I must go back to the south, or die; but he was mistaken, for, with the blessing of God, I got better."

Monsieur de Sainville was not given to questioning; but he now seemed in the interrogative mood, for he made many inquiries concerning the life Nathalie led at Mademoiselle Dantin's. Her heart was opened, since she felt they had met at the fair of Beaucaire, and she answered freely. A few graphic, but not resentful, touches sketched Mademoiselle Dantin; the little Chevalier was not forgotten. She also spoke of her favourite pupils; of the grief it was to part from them; of her lonely walks in the garden; of the dreaming hours spent in her solitary room; and in all she said, there was girlish piquancy, blending with a simple and homely grace. He listened to her, with an occasional smile, that showed he always remained attentive, and yet with a sort of abstraction in his manner that rendered it very difficult to say how far he really cared for the ready replies his questions found,—how much he was guided by politeness, and how much by interest.

"Your life must have been dull at that school,"

he said, at length. "Did you never go to parties of pleasure,—to balls, or anything of the kind?"

"I went to five balls," she replied, with the prompt and accurate memory of one whose pleasures had been few and far between.

"Do you care about dancing?"

She eyed him wonderingly. Did she care about it! Well, those serious gentlemen, who cared about nothing themselves, did ask strange questions.

"Yes," she answered, "she liked it very much."

"Better than that Provençal ciotat?" said he, looking at her glass.

Nathalie drank the wine; but when she laid down her empty glass on the table, she remembered that Monsieur de Sainville had tasted nothing. The buffet was open; her eye ran hastily over it; there was no second glass, for she was the first guest he had received in his hermitage, and to whom he had dispensed hospitality.

"Oh! sir," she said, rather pained, "you needed that wine, after your fatigue, much more than I did. You look pale and tired; I am sure you needed it."

He smiled at her earnest tone; said that he would

borrow her glass; and poured himself out some wine. He then reclined back in his chair, and drank slowly, looking at her all the time.

"There are no wines like the southern wines," he said, pausing once; "so light and genial."

She shook her head in a shrewd way, that implied "I believe so;" and said aloud, "Oh! no; there are none like them."

"And I think," he resumed, at the next pause, "that this Provençal ciotat surpasses every other southern vintage."

"Do you really think so?" exclaimed Nathalie, looking delighted; "or does it only amuse you to see how foolish I can be about my poor Provence?" she added, a little doubtfully.

"Mademoiselle Nathalie," said he, quickly, "you are uncharitable. I give you my word that I think everything from Provence both excellent and delightful."

He half-bent forward as he spoke, and there was such unusual warmth in his look and tone, that Nathalie blushed deeply, not knowing whether he did not mean a compliment. On reflection, she thought this very unlikely, and said, a little archly:

"The ciotat, especially."

"Yes, of course, the ciotat," he replied, laying down his empty glass, and looking rather abstracted.

"Then why not take more?" she urged; "you must be so fatigued!"

"You seem quite confident about that."

"I know it was a fatiguing and dangerous task."

"Upon my word, there was no danger."

"What, none at all?" said Nathalie, looking disappointed.

"To please you, I will admit there was a little. You evidently like the perilous."

"I like everything resembling an adventure," she candidly replied; "everything unlike the routine of dull, every-day life. I liked the distant danger on which I looked with a beating heart; the storm itself I liked, even when I feared it most. I like being here to-night, in this spot, looking so wild and solitary that one might fancy it lying miles away from a human dwelling. I like to sit here and watch those gloomy beeches, shedding their solemn twilight around,—to wonder, and half-shudder, at the mysterious depths beyond; and when I am most afraid, to contrast the darkness of the night without, with the warmth and cheerful light within."

She half-bent over the fire as she spoke thus, with evident enjoyment of her position. The wood burned brightly on the hearth; the night looked dark beyond, but the flame lit everything around with its flickering yet vivid glow. A warm ray illumed the grave features of Monsieur de Sainville, as he sat on one side of the fire-place, his elbow resting on the low mantel-shelf, and fell on the animated face, and bending profile of the young girl who sat opposite to him. The thunder and lightning had long ceased; but the rain still fell heavily, and the wind moaned away, with a low and lamentable sound, along the lonely avenues. There was a brief silence.

"Yes, this is indeed a solitary place," said Nathalie, speaking almost under her breath.

"Do you like solitude?" asked Monsieur de Sainville.

"I should not like to be alone here," was the frank reply.

"Indeed solitude is too quiet and silent a lady for you, my child," said he, kindly.

"*Mon enfant*," though by no means implying the same degree of familiarity as the English expression of "my child," is still significant of an affectionate

freedom Nathalie had not expected from Monsieur de Sainville; but their acquaintance had made great progress that evening. She could not help thinking so, and looking at him a little thoughtfully. He did not notice it; for he had risen, and stood near the window, listening to the rain and wind without.

"It is scarcely raining now," he said, after a pause. "I think, Mademoiselle Nathalie, it will be best for me to go alone to the château, and send a servant to you, with a cloak, and anything else you may need."

Nathalie did not object, but she saw Monsieur de Sainville prepare to leave her with anything but a sense of security. This lonely spot, with its wild look-out, and the deepening gloom of night gathering around it, frightened her,--she knew not why. Still she did not like to remonstrate; but scarcely had the door closed upon him, than fear overcame shame; she left her seat, ran quickly to the door, opened it, and said, eagerly:

"I would much sooner not wait, sir;—I would much rather go with you."

"I warn you," said he, coming back, "that it will be perhaps more of an adventure than even you will

like; I have already perceived several newly-born islands and various unknown seas."

Nathalie bent forward, and cautiously put out her graceful head, for the rain had not quite ceased. The prospect was by no means cheering. Evening had set in; over a wide lawn, covered with pools of water, extended a grey and gloomy sky, in which the pale moon now shone with a dim and troubled light; between earth and heaven floated a thin white mist, which made the château, already at a sufficient distance, seem more distant still. Nathalie uttered an exclamation of dismay. He urged her not to make the attempt. She put one foot forward, took a step, and then hesitated. He thought she agreed to stay, and walked on; but she hastily descended the wooden, steps, and quickly stood by his side.

"I cannot stay there alone," she said.

"What are you afraid of?"

"Of the wind, of the rain,—of everything."

He smiled, but forbore to remonstrate. He helped her to throw her scarf over her head, gave a dubious glance, which she detected, at the satin slippers, and offered her his arm. The wind was keen, and drove the rain full in Nathalie's face; but she enjoyed the struggle, laughed, and gaily shook

away the glittering drops from her cheek, to which the breeze gave heightened bloom. She looked the very realization of that delightful Louisa, from whose cheek the poet longed to kiss away the mountain rains. They had not walked far, when a sudden pause occurred. She looked disconcerted, and stopped; he pretended not to see that her slipper had come off. They had not gone on five steps further, when the other slipper stuck fast in the damp earth. This time he smiled. Nathalie looked extremely provoked, and pettishly asked "if it was the slipper's fault if the earth would be damp?" to which he gravely replied, "certainly not." But when this agreeable incident had occurred a certain number of times, Nathalie lost patience, declared the slippers might remain behind if they liked, and that she could very well walk home without them.

"No, my dear child," said he, with an authoritative kindness, "you will not do this; you will go back to the little hermitage, warm yourself once more, and wait until I send you all you need."

"Very well, sir," replied Nathalie, with child-like docility, for she was touched at the good-humoured and indulgent patience with which he had borne all her little caprices.

On hearing her ready assent, he praised her for being so good and docile; promised to send soon, and proceeded on his way, whilst she returned alone to the little hermitage.

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